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FRIENDS
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Timber Line

BY ALIDA SIMS MALKUS

AUTHOR OF "RAQUEL OF THE RANCH COUNTRY" AND "THE DRAGON FLY OF ZUÑI"

Illustrated by Ruth King

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TIMBER LINE

CHAPTER I

A CABIN ON THE CASCADA

CAPPED in snow, their flanks of felspar rock robed in glistening drifts, the Coronado Peaks swept to towering altitudes above the dark green of the forests. Keen, fresh, heady as wine, was the air in those high places, and each minute crevasse, each ridge, was etched clearly in the sparkling winter sunlight.

But there was no eye to see the glories outspread before these sister queens of the Rockies. The eagles which soared above them through the blue of sum-

mer had departed to lower altitudes with the first icy breath of winter, and even now were nesting in canyon crags, where as early as March their Spartan young would hatch. The grizzly of the Holy Ghost would not stir from his deep cave and still deeper lethargy for another month, and it was too far above timber line for the lobo and his followers to find food.

The sun was sinking rapidly. Over the ridges a sharp light wind whistled. But below in the forests there was a hush, deeper than the hush of summer, for now there was no scurrying about of small creatures, the hum of insect life was lacking, and even the trees slept.

Yet beneath the low branches of a cluster of fir trees a life-and-death struggle was going on. A large wolf, gaunt beneath a splendid, tawny coat, strove in silent agony, his lips twisted back from his white tusks, to free himself from the icy steel thing that had held him all day. He made not a sound to break the stillness. This was instinctive caution, for so dulled with pain had his hearing become that he did not even notice the approach of a human being.

On a ridge above the fir and spruce stand a figure

had appeared, and now stood outlined against the turquoise sky and snowy peaks; a girl, dressed in furry woolens of white and green, snowshoes in hand. She looked across the rim of the world and in a moment, as though a master stage director had so managed, her figure was bathed in a rosy light that changed the glacier-like heights above to flame-colored damask.

The lobo gnawed with concentrated fury at his imprisoned foot. The girl had turned, poising a moment on the ridge before starting downward. A long blue shadow was cast before her. With a wrench the wolf tore away from the trap and without delay limped off on three feet, disappearing among the boles of pine and fir. In the jaws of the trap dangled a large bloody paw.

Now the sun sank behind the great peaks. It would be dark all too soon. The girl stooped quickly to fasten on her snowshoes, then made toward the darkening shelter of the spruce. A snowy ptarmigan, sole dweller on those arctic heights since the red fox had captured his mate, fluttered before her. Now she saw the gleam of the trap and the dark trickle of blood staining the snow. She clasped her hands and caught her breath with a gasp.

"Oh, oh! *Damn*, curse them! I knew it, I knew it!"

Kneeling down, the girl pulled at the trap's trophy. The paw was caught fast. She tried to open the formidable jaws of the thing, but it was impossible. Only a steel bar wielded by a man's strength could open it. She rose to her feet, tears springing, and started off rapidly down the mountain, making her way easily through the open forest and over meadows where within a few weeks she would be picking alpine flowers.

For half a mile the girl sped lightly over the snow, her snowshoes barely breaking the crust. Coming to a spot that was evidently familiar she cast about for a moment, then in the dimming light pounced upon another trap. It was cleverly concealed on the far side of a log and set with a frozen hare for bait. With her forest staff she struck the trap spring smartly. It clicked with an ugly snap which made her jump back. Then she came close and stooped over it. Yes, it was sprung all right.

"There," said she softly to herself and to the forest, "there'll be nothing more caught in *that* trap." A moment later she was again darting through the trees. The increasing darkness urged her to

greater speed, but as she emerged from the gloom of the forest into a barren open space the air was once more filled with rosy light. The afterglow of the setting sun had commenced at the foot of the mountain and was slowly creeping upward. The world seemed to palpitate electrically with delicate colors, mauve, green, orchid, and the spotless snow reflected and radiated the light.

The girl sped along the white crest, avoiding those stretches where barren rock thrust forth. Her flying figure could scarcely have been seen against the snow, but now and again it was silhouetted against a background of somber pine, flashing from one point to another, scarf whipping out behind.

A quarter of a mile away, on a hog's-back running parallel to but lower than the height which the girl was traveling, a man was scanning the far slopes through a field glass. The figure darted across the radius of his fixed gaze. With an exclamation he swept the slope until he caught the moving object again. For a moment only he focused on the flashing figure, for it disappeared over the crest and down toward the Santo Spirito canyon. The man rubbed his lens impatiently and looked again.

"Am I seeing things?" he grumbled, half amused.

"A flying wraith of the mountains? Is it an ice maiden, or what?"

After all, who could it be, all alone, way up here in this wilderness? He'd inquire down below. Garen Shepherd, a young irrigation engineer, dug his spiked walking-stick into the treacherous surface and started down the trail—an hour or so, and even the prolonged afterglow, the amazing snow-light, would be gone. He had barely time to get back to the canyon of the Amarillo and Benty's Lodge, where he was staying.

Below, in the canyon of the Santo Spirito, it lacked but three minutes of nightfall. When the dying afterglow reached a certain point the canyon would be suddenly submerged in darkness. Damon O'Neill, the forest ranger of the Coronado slopes, led his mare into the log stable back of his cabin. He blanketed her against a bitter night, so bitter that even the chatter of the Cascada, the noisy stream that flowed at the bottom of the canyon, was sealed up and silenced in a prison of ice. He buckled the straps deftly, patted the sorrel mare's nose, and went out, closing the door carefully behind him.

As he stood on the cabin steps, peering nervously about and gazing where the upper mountain still

glowed with light, the white figure for which he was looking emerged from the spruce. With a shout and a few sliding steps the girl reached the cabin just as the canyon was slipping into night.

"Dawn! You just made it. Where've you been so late?"

"Snowshoeing up on the divide, Dad. It was glorious. Don't worry. I keep my eye on the time." She was unstrapping her snowshoes, while her father gathered an armful of wood from the pile beside the door. She hung the shoes on a nail against the cabin, opened the door for her father, and followed him inside. In a moment squares of light twinkled out from the cabin windows. All about the little log house fir and pine rose like clustered cathedral spires. All the universe was dark except for the far stars—and for pairs of shining eyes that came and went through the forest.

Inside the cabin it was warm and close. Damon kicked the logs smoldering in the wide stone fireplace and threw on light fuel till they blazed high. In a small kitchen adjoining the one big living-room a little cook-stove gave out waves of warmth and the smell of supper, of spruce pitch and resin burning, of wet woolen things drying.

Dawn had taken off her outer wraps and her heavy boots. She slipped into felt house shoes and an old green sweater and skirt. She hurried about laying the table, filling the coffee pot, and handing her father a fresh towel after his noisy ablutions. The cabin was very pleasant, the main room long, and eighteen or twenty feet wide. Against the log walls hung heavy Indian rugs, but so snug and well built was Damon O'Neill's cabin that the rugs never swelled with drafts, no matter how the wind might howl outside. The floors too were strewn with well-worn Navajo blankets. The furniture was rough, made by hand—before the fire a rustic seat, a long table with two benches at one side, some chairs, a chest, a wood box at the other, and five shelves of worn books.

Dawn turned the wick lower in the kerosene lamp and they sat down to supper; beans and chili, brown bread and steaming canned tomatoes, stewed apricots deluged with canned cream. They ate in silence. Damon O'Neill seemed tired, but Dawn appeared not to notice it, though she cast him covert glances. When he took his place before the fire she came as usual and sat on a little hassock at his knee. He drew her head down and puffed at his briar pipe in con-

tentment, putting his stockinged feet on top of Shep, the white collie that slept before the fire.

"You tired, Damon?"

"No. Just sleepy from the cold. Thinkin' about a young lady I know, too." He patted the girl's tousled auburn hair, his brows knitting. "What's troublin' you, Dawn? Lonesome? Well, I guess it'll be school for you next year, Missie."

"School! Who should I be lonesome for when I've got you for company! I tell you, I'm mad, Daddy, if you must know. You'd find it out anyway; you always do. I found another lobo's paw in a trap this afternoon. Up on the divide. Not very far below timber line."

Damon O'Neill shook his head in annoyance. He did not answer for a few moments.

"Too bad. Hate to see it. It's all wrong," he said. "But these predatory animal fellows've got their orders. It's been a hard winter for the stockmen, and it's going to be a harder summer down below. They think they had it bad last year, but," he predicted, "it was nothing compared to what they're going to get."

"You think there's going to be another drouth, Damon?" queried Dawn anxiously.

"Drouth? No. And that would never affect us up here to amount to anything. The forest will always draw its own water, Dawn, never forget that. But down below it's different. Yet as a matter of fact," he went on, "for the past seven years they've had more rainfall in this country than for a quarter century past.

"But there'll be little grass just the same. Dust will fly in their pastures and the folks down below will be bleating, 'Drouth, drouth.' They've not sowed; so they can't reap. They're greedy, those fellows, but can't see it. Overstocked, that's the trouble; the range eaten up, and cattle dying for lack of food. And what with losses from the wolves and lions—" Damon puffed for a while silently.

"And so they're killing off all the wild things that interfere with cattle or eat anything cattle might eat." Dawn shuddered. "I'd feel awful if they ever caught the old Custer wolf. They'd never get him to take poison bait, would they, Damon? He's too smart, isn't he? He wouldn't even let one of his pack touch poison bait, would he? If they were starving he wouldn't take a chance."

"I guess that's right," agreed her father. "He knows about traps too. Can smell one under a snow

drift. He's got almost human reasoning, that lobo."

"I reckon that couldn't have been his paw in the trap this afternoon then?"

"Not likely. And old Grizzly"—Damon leaned his head contentedly against the balsam pillow on the chair's back—"that bear can spring a trap easier than a man. Hinray Dorsay claims he crept up on the bear one time. It was traveling along through light feathery snow and its foot struck the outer rim of a trap. It stopped, then dainty and cunning as if he'd thought it out, struck straight at the spring—"

"And?" Dawn prompted breathlessly, although she had heard the tale twenty times before from old Hinray himself.

"And sprung the teeth of the trap, click!"

The white collie whimpered and yelped softly in his sleep before the fire, wrapped in primeval visions of the chase. Outside a far, lone wail came up the canyon.

"But, Dad," Dawn pressed, "can't the Government see that the big animals wouldn't kill hardly any stock if they had enough of the small game they're used to?"

"The scheme of Nature is all upset," Damon replied slowly, "and it's going to take some time to

straighten it out again. They never can get back to where they were. But that's to be expected to a certain extent when man enters into the scheme.—It's hard for us of the forest to stick up for the animals when they pile up such records as the Magdalena wolf's a few summers ago. Remember?"

Dawn nodded. "Seventy-two sheep killed in two weeks. A hundred and fifty head of cattle in six months."

"Yet we need the animals." Damon shook his head. "We need them all here in the forest, and in the end only harm can come, I believe, from this business of killing off all one kind of creature and favoring another. They never learned a thing from the slaughter of the passenger pigeon, though when they'd wiped 'em clean out there came a hemlock blight that near destroyed hundreds of miles of forests.

"We kill off vultures, eagles, hawks and goshawks, cat, wolf, and lion, and leave the range free for rabbits to breed, and gophers, and prairie dogs to gnaw at roots, and all the grain-eatin' creatures to fill their craws with seed for next year's range.—That's not going to better Nature's scheme of things. No, sir, not yet awhile." Damon O'Neill was off on

his favorite topic, but Dawn remembered something that she had been saving up to tell him.

"Damon, what do you think? I've found the great pine of the Silverstake. No, let me tell you about it. You know that forty where McGuire's homestead stops? Follow that ridge up about a mile to where it faults; it drops there maybe twenty-five feet. But the same vein shows up in a ledge that rises several hundred feet away." Dawn had turned round on her hassock to face her father, her eyes round with excitement. "The ledge is broad, tilted—and the same stratum runs right through it, all right. It's the mother vein, a part of the main mountain, I'm sure."

"Vein of granite?" Damon reached out to tweak Dawn's ear. She paid no heed, brushing him off.

"And it's on a corner of the spot you always said was the old survey boundary of the Indian Reservation grant. The Little Falls of the Holy Ghost come out of the mountain not far above it and a little inside the line. And, Father, *I* know where it comes from! I've seen the source!" She sat back solemnly to note the effect on her father.

Damon opened his eyes wide, but it was only to mock her. He laughed for the first time that week. "I might have known you'd get up to the source

some day. Oh, last summer, was it? Why didn't you tell me then? I guess there's not half a dozen rangers, including myself, ever made the climb; and no one else except the Pueblo Indians from down below fifteen or twenty miles.

"But what has that to do with the Silverstake, and what makes you think you've located the old tree?"

"Because, Daddy, it was when I was standing by the pool where the water seems to gush out of the mountain that I first saw the white quartz of the faulted vein where it cropped up along the mountain side. I thought to myself then, 'Here's where the Indians must have stood and seen that vein beneath them, and then found silver.' I was trying to fix it in my mind so that I could find that ledge with the quartz vein again when I came down. That was a hard job." Damon nodded sympathetically. "But I couldn't fix on any landmark.

"Then today it just came to me. I was standing on the end of that ridge where it faults, looking away over the mountain side, following the ridge along, because the snow sticking to it outlined it almost like the quartz had from above—though I hadn't thought much about it since summer—and

suddenly my eyes picked out a great tree, higher than all the rest, a pine among fir and hemlock. It stood out from the rest, it was so green. *They* were covered with snow, but the top branches of this big pine didn't hold any. It was an old tree, Damon. Could it be the Silverstake?"

"Might be," replied Damon. "It's been sixty, seventy-five years, since that pine was blazed, according to the old survey report. They say it bore a 'witness' of the old Indian grant, and of the location of an old claim on the Silverstake, beneath. There's a record in the archives of the state that speaks of the Reservation witness too.

"But no one thought of it for fifty years. Then this business came up about the water rights of the Pueblos, and their Reservation boundaries. The attorney representing them was a damn clever scoundrel that was at the same time representin' a political gang. This gang wanted to take over the Reservation for themselves, 'throw it open for the use of the citizens of the state,' meanin' themselves. The attorney got a resurvey made. He got a measure introduced openin' up the Indian Reservation to the public; but the new boundaries never were accepted, so fortunately that held them up for a while.

"It's bein' contested now. The Indians didn't know about it at first, nor did the Forest Service. You remember, dear. They couldn't find any witness stake or tree that marked the survey of the original grant. No trace. And how could they? It might have been struck by lightnin', or blown over, or possibly cut down.

"Anyway, it's always remained a mystery, that old blaze. It's a pity, too"—Damon knocked the ashes out of his pipe preparatory to turning in for the night—"because I staked me a claim up there. You were a little thing not more than four or five years old. You never heard me speak of it? Well, no one else has either. Scotch enough in me for that!" Damon chuckled.

"Well, that's it. Right inside the forty, in the National Forest Reservation, that being open to any one. I was looking to verify the Indians' original grant, and I found me a silver mine. Much good is it likely to do me!

"But to this day I'd swear there was silver ore in that quartz. I got a fair sample out of the bed of the stream below the falls a way. Must have washed down from an outcropping of the vein above. But there was no use doing anything with it; I hadn't

the money or the time for prospecting, and then the uncertainty as to the claim came up, and I knew if I turned it over to the Pueblos it would likely be grabbed from them.

"I had the sample assayed and dreamed about it awhile—what we'd do when you got to be a big girl, with the proceeds from our mine." He laughed a bit wryly. "I never told any one about it. Thought I might as well get the *right* location myself. I couldn't even find the outcropping on the exposed vein, though. I'm no miner. I'm a forester."

"What would we do if we had a mine?" Dawn mused. "I'd get Whitey Shep a silver-studded collar, and Piñon a silver-mounted Cordoba leather saddle, and you that set of books you've never got and would have time to read." Dawn laughed happily. "And we'd go to the Canadian woods, and to—"

"To bed, girl, to bed. It's all of nine o'clock." Damon rose abruptly and turned toward the door. He lifted his hand awkwardly to brush a sudden mist from his eyes. At times vague but nevertheless poignant misgivings about his girl wrung him.

"We didn't mount the blue columbine tonight, Damon." Dawn reminded him sleepily of her neglected studies. She still lolled before the fire, her

cheeks flushed, her eyes dreamy, her strong young body relaxed in the heat. "I've three hundred specimens to mount. The alpine blossoms will soon be coming; it will be spring before we know it."

"That's right," Damon agreed in a cheerful tone. He was fumbling on the shelf for his flashlight. "We got talking, and no lessons. To tell the truth I was tired. I was down at Benty's cabin all day. One of the Government trappers was there. He's going the rounds of his traps in the morning. And two of the engineers from the Irrigation Service. They're up looking over water sources, calculating snow depth, and how much rainshed and snow water are likely to come down in the spring. The young chap went up the mountain alone."

"Oh, Damon—" Dawn sat up quickly—"why didn't he stay here? Did you tell him about me? Oh, Dad, it's such fun to see some one once in a while! I like those Irrigation men. They understand about forests and trees."

"She wants company," Damon thought. "Trees and animals, they've had to take the place of folks to her."

Out of the silence that surrounded the warm little cabin above the Cascada sounded a sharp, eerie yap-

ping. It was answered by a far and mournful howling, a full-throated wolf song that rose and swelled. There was a moment of utter quiet, broken only by the ticking of Damon's wrist watch. Then, just outside the cabin apparently, there came a sudden barking.

"The coyotes are growing worse every winter, spite of everything," Damon said. "They've had to come up into the mountains for food. I'd better get out to Little Sorrel. I should have put a new fastening on that door. She might kick it down." He took a burning stick from the fireplace, and stepped outside, pulling his fur cap over his ears, but not stopping for a blazer.

Dawn reluctantly pulled herself up from before the fire. She pushed aside a thick Indian rug curtaining a doorway which led into her little bedroom and looped it over a nail. In the cold room she undressed quickly, knelt in her nightgown and bare feet a moment, then opened her window a crack, fastened it by a stout iron hook, and sprang into bed.

Tomorrow she would look again for the Silverstake Pine. If her chestnut pony's foot was healed she would ride him. Perhaps they would meet the

engineer. In less than a minute she was asleep, deep in the long dreamless slumber of mountain nights.

Damon O'Neill sat long before the fire. He came in from securing the stable door, looked into his daughter's room, saw that she was asleep, and sank into his chair again.

A fine girl. What a puny little thing she'd been when he brought her to the mountains. "Take her out west," the clinic specialist had said. "Sunshine, altitude." This was the way he'd found. Study, a year of practical training, and Damon O'Neill emerged a forest ranger.

Before he could get the baby up here into the sunshine she had been starving herself, clenching her tiny teeth on the spoon forced between her lips. It was the thought of all that, everything that had happened before and after his wife's death, that had kept him up here. Two wretched years in the east, while his wife was dying of tuberculosis, had filled him with a hatred of cities. Poverty and want had left him with a deep-seated fear of ever being without money in the bank. The mountains had given him a life that was worth living, and security.

"I'll stick by the mountain," he swore. "It saved Dawn for me, and a forest full of trees is better

company than most cities full o' humans. Folks may say I'm not doing right by her, but she's to go to school a year on the money in the bank, some of it, an' the rest shall be saved for her."

Damon reached deep into his pocket and pulled out a chunk of white quartz. A bright silvery vein ran through it; a pretty thing.

"By Golly, if Dawn ever *did* find the Silverstake witness tree!"

CHAPTER II

THE NYMPH AND THE SHEPHERDS

Two veterans of the Cordilleran slopes could have borne witness to the changes that the coming of white men had wrought in a century. One was a great yellow pine whose growth-rings would have shown that it had been a sapling long before the first Spaniards came. The pine was blasted now, its once towering crown leveled almost to the height of the trees about it. Only its girth was evidence of what a mighty tree the yellow pine had been.

The other veteran was a golden eagle whose years were close to the century mark. In his youth he had soared above endless plains that were as green and undulating as the far-off ocean. Now they were a desert all the year. As the green retreated the eagle too retreated farther and farther into the mountains. Yet even here food had grown somewhat scarce of late. And the eagle's pinions were becoming less powerful with every season. He could no longer soar for hours at a time hundreds of feet above the peaks, poising almost motionless in the sky, sailing without a wing-beat down over blue abysses.

Now he often perched upon the great blasted tree. It stood near falling water on a sunny slope that looked up to the Coronado Peaks, unchanging, familiar.

Time and again Dawn had passed within a few hundred feet of the great tree without knowing it. Time and again the golden eagle had cast a fleeting shadow over Dawn's trail and more often than not she had thought it a cloud.

As spring thawed the slopes she tried again to find the Silverstake pine and again she visited the source above the waterfall. Dawn could never have explained how much the spot meant to her. Nor

could any one who had not her love for the mountain have understood. This spot, unconquered for so long! It was hers by right of discovery. She shared old secrets long guarded by the Indians.

But now the spring ranges were opening up, and Dawn was very busy helping Damon. She came in one day after a long morning's ride to far-lying western pastures to find old Hinray Dorsay, their friend, and one of the most faithful of the rangers, seated on the steps of the aspen log cabin, combing his long mustaches. There was trouble on the range —trespassing before the pastures were in condition. Hinray's knowledge was wide and infinitely practical, drawn from Bible and almanac, experience and government bulletins.

Goats had eaten the bark off the young trees on a whole hillside, Dawn told him. "The Rocky Mountain sheep never did that, did they, Hinray?" she asked. "But then they were native dwellers in the mountains."

"No," Hinray pronounced as he moved from the cabin steps to a place in the sun, "no, goats ain't indignant to these mount'ns, and trees is. Consequence, the two don't git along."

Dawn's ready laughter melted the wrath with

which she had been complaining to the old ranger of the invasion of the forest. "Well," she gasped, "we're indignant, if the goats aren't, I guess! Oh, Hinray, you're funny, and smart."

Hinray appeared gratified. "Take stock," he went on; "cattle stock, I mean. They trim the grass and let the young trees alone. I told Superintendent what would happen iffen he gave a permit to Gonzales to graze them goats and sheep on the range. Well, I guess you've saw Bald Mountain meadow this spring?"

Dawn nodded. "Daddy's furious. But that isn't the worst. Gonzales and his herders simply will not keep in their own pasture. They roam all over the mountain. If I find 'em outside that fence again—" She struck her quirt through the air with sudden fury at the desecration.

Hinray nodded and pointed a horny forefinger over her shoulder. Dawn sprang to her feet and looked up. On the trail above them a rider appeared. He waved before he was hidden by the trees.

"It's Daddy!" Eagerness and pleasure erased her momentary passion. She stood in the sun, her thick short hair touched with golden light. Hinray looked fondly and admiringly at the robust young figure.

"Soople as a mountain cat," he thought; "sinewy, yet purty as a tiger lily."

"A big gal for fifteen," he said aloud. "Seems like yestiddy, Dawn, that your father brought you up to the Santo Spirito. Never thought you'd take hold. Sickly as a spruce seedlin' transplanted in August. Used to lay out in the sun right where yore paw'd set you; never seemed to want to move. All eyes, yore teeny hands as trassparent." He reminisced, not thinking whether Dawn heard him or not. But she came and sat down on the log beside the grizzled ranger.

"I don't even remember, Hinray. I don't seem to remember anything ever but being up here. Yet I was three years old when we came. Tell me about Dad. Is he just the same?" She looked up to where the trail, which lost itself for a way through an aspen grove, reappeared on the last stretch down to the cabin.

"Just the same?" Hinray pulled out his pipe and stuffed it critically. "Don't know as he's any different really. He's easier in the heart, that's plain. He was awful silent and seemed like he had a grouch against some one in those days. But then, no wonder.

"He had a old Mexican señora to mind you all

day while he was away; but he found the old woman wanted to chew up yore food herself for you, like a pigeon does for its young. He had a hard time dissuadin' her. After that he tried to tend to feedin' you hisself—out o' a book. Howsoever that might 'a' been, you started to thrive with the old señora and grew so fat you useter hammer with a spoon on the little table I made you, for more food.

"I recollect comin' in one day when you was about six years old and findin' you keepin' house for yore paw. Dryin' dishes with an apron on, stirrin' the oatmeal so's it wouldn't scorch."

"Yo-ho, yo-hoo," Damon O'Neill's greeting rang out as he came at a trot down the little clearing toward the cabin on the Rio Cascada. Dawn shouted and ran to meet him, catching a stirrup and running along beside the sorrel mare. Damon swung down, pulled Dawn to him, and kissed her.

"Dinner ready?" He was unsaddling the mare and would turn her loose to graze.

"Yes," Dawn said as they went into the cabin, whither Hinray had preceded them. "Hinray got it, that's why. He came just in time to make the biscuits. I was making them, honestly, Damon.

But Hinray said he'd rather make 'em himself than eat mine!"

"Dawn sot the table, though," Hinray testified, coming in from the kitchen with a plate of smoking biscuits and a pan of steaming potatoes. "And it sure does a rough-and-ready ranger good to set to a decent civilized table once in a while. Specially after bein' out cruisin' or reconnoitrin'. I like a femin-ine touch," he complimented.

As a matter of fact the cabin was wholly masculine. Boots, spurs, lay around the floor; yet it was Damon, not Dawn, who made Shep gnaw his bones outside. Pipes and bags of tobacco were laid where convenient, but coats and sweaters were hung neatly against the wall, and on a wide space above a large desk hung a map of the Reservation, a map colored in sections and studded with many pegs.

Hinray could be heard busy with the wash-basin, after which he carefully combed his long, sandy mustaches and the one upstanding lock on the top of his bald head. Then they sat down. Spring had come, and there were Mariposa lilies in the center of the table. It was covered with a pale yellow oilcloth much admired by Hinray, who speared his boiled potatoes reverently after Dawn had served herself.

"Glad it ain't beans. Beans, beans, is all I get. I'll take my starch in potatoes and corn. By the way, Chief"—he turned toward Damon while he rapidly halved and buttered half a dozen biscuits—"you seen how they're producin' paper from corn stalks? That ought to go a long ways toward easin' up on the spruce and hemlock, eh?"

Damon nodded. He had been eating silently.

"It's not cutting the timber that's worrying me," he said at length; "it's the damn range and grazing privilege. I don't know what's come over these fellows. There's a new bunch of cattle over on the Corona. Heard about it this morning from one of the campers down below and rode over, but they'd moved to the other side of the canyon.

"I've had no word from headquarters nor from the owners. Not a sign of a grazing permit. I'm going over in the morning and demand the name of the owners. I'll probably have to put them off.

"McGuire is the right kind of homesteader," Damon pursued. "His land is his home, and we can give him as much rented winter range, and free grazing too, as his stock calls for. He keeps his stock supplied with a part of their winter feed, but Gonzales tries to get practically all his range off

the forest preserves. I'm convinced he's not operating entirely for himself.

"He can't understand yet why he shouldn't put a hundred head of cattle on a pasture that's got only enough range for twenty-five. Then he tried to run in two hundred head early this spring while the little trout lily and the bladderpod were still in bloom and before any of the wheat grasses were more than an inch high, and what happened?"

"He lost fifteen head from young larkspur," Dawn supplied significantly, "and the foothill death-camas, which are worse poison of course, especially in the early spring. And they cropped down the sprouting mountain brome, the blue grass, and all the forage that should have come to seed in June and July, and ground it into the earth before we discovered them, so that there'll be little or no crop this summer.

"Dad, did you ever find out what the plant was that poisoned that lower range late last autumn?" Dawn had finished her dinner and was sitting on a bench by the door, mending a hole in the toe of the stocking she had on, holding her foot up conveniently as she talked. "Nothing like that ever happened on that range before."

"It was a late season," Damon mused, "and frost had something to do with altering the plant chemically. The plant simply produced something that didn't agree with the cattle. I took those poor Picuris Indians off that range and gave them good pasture up above, free. They're dependent mainly on forest range, and on the water and drainage of the northwest slopes, and if any homesteader has a right to what the forest has to offer surely those Pueblos have. Though Gonzales raised an awful kick at their getting free firewood and a few hundred feet of new roof-poles.

"They were certainly grateful; they are a fine lot, the Jemez and Picuris fellows."

"Mebbe some letter about that new stock might 'a' bin in the mail this morning," said Hinray. "I heard that the little Mexican feller who's been carryin' it up couldn't get past the lower Cascada. It's higher even than usual."

"That might be," Damon assented, "but until I get orders over my head I'm going after them. Dawn, you like to ride over to Gonzales' pasture after dinner and see how he's behavin'? I can't go this afternoon. I hear there's goats coming up sometime this week."

"Sure." Dawn nodded emphatically, the light of battle in her eye. This was a great game. "Goats! Piñon can smell 'em a mile."

"How come you call that horse o' yours 'Little Nut,' Piñon?" asked Hinray. "He's as well growed as any mountain horse I ever see."

"Because when we first saw him, down in Benty's corral," Dawn explained, "he was as little and sweet as a pine nut. The prettiest little colt I ever saw—wasn't he, Damon?—frisking around. I wanted him so badly I was afraid to speak of it for fear Dad wouldn't say yes, or that Benty had already sold him to some one else, or that maybe he would not want to part with him himself. I couldn't sleep all that night thinking, 'Benty'll never, never sell him, never in this world. I wouldn't if he was mine.'

"But the next day we went back, and I rid him—yes, I know, Dad; 'rode,' then. He was less'n a year old. And Benty said yes. Then Dad gave him to me for my tenth birthday. So we grew up together. He taught me how to swim, didn't you, honey?" The sound of hoofs daintily placed came from the doorway. A chestnut pony put his head, a surprisingly shapely and beautiful head, in through the door.

Dawn swept the dinner dishes to the kitchen table, covered them with a cloth. She seized her old brown felt hat and was outside in a moment, saddling Piñon. She vaulted into the saddle from the stoop, the motion seeming to sweep both horse and rider around and up the trail.

Damon grinned. "Quick work. She's been a wonderful help to me this spring and summer. Deserves an assistant's billet. This range trespass business is getting my goat—but not the other fellow's!" O'Neill smiled feebly at the jest. "Seriously, Hinray, there's something queer about it.

"There's so much work to be done this spring. There's a bad fire-trap in that half-dead timber on Rocky Canyon Point. And orders last month to verify that survey of last summer that cuts into the Indian Reservation. Do you know, Hinray, I've gone over that forty half a dozen times and always come out the same. I come within two feet of the old survey of the original Reservation grant."

"Tree there?" Hinray asked with raised eyebrows.

"Blazed witness, you mean? No," Damon O'Neill replied slowly. "No, that secret, and one of my own, are hidden in the forest, Hinray. In the heart of one tree on the whole mountain."

"And it's a shame," Hinray nodded, "because I heard when I came up from the city that politics was surely going to open up these mount'ins an' their perquisites to one gang, 'stead of what's lawful to whosoever applies first for homestead, timber or range. Iffen we could only find the old blazed tree!"

"Dawn thought she had found it last winter," Damon answered quietly, "and when I went out with her a few days later the snow had melted in a sudden thaw and we couldn't pick it out; everything was green. Last month I went over the ground and thought I located it—a great yellow pine. Cut into her?" Damon shrugged. "We've orders not to touch a stick of timber on the entire slope there till the boundary matter's decided."

"And the spruce beetle is got into the west slope too," was Hinray's doleful rejoinder by way of commiseration. "First time I've saw it up here." He puffed a moment, then took out his pipe, shook it carefully, and remarked with embarrassment, "But it ain't about the spruce beetle's I'm worrying. I reckon I ought to tell you, Chief, that the animal fellers, Predit'ry Bureau, you know, are hintin' that we're causin' them some trouble up here. 'Stead of coöperatin'."

Damon noted that Hinray loyally said "we." "What do you mean, Hinray?" he asked. "That's either a serious charge or it's nothing."

"Claims he don't get results trappin' and exterminatin' like he should," Hinray explained apologetically. In his embarrassment he took out his pocket comb and began combing his mustaches. "Says his poison baits is somehow removed and his traps is sprung."

"Nonsense!" Damon disposed of the charge briskly. "Impossible! I'll consider such a thing when we hear about it officially, Hinray." Then fearing that Hinray might feel his information had been too lightly received, he added, "I've known bear to drag bait off before eating it, and this may be one of the cases where some remarkable lobo has sprung a trap.

"Those fellows take themselves very seriously, Hinray. Of course we coöperate loyally. Though the Creator alone knows I hate to see the animals go! They've had to annihilate all the little beasties that used to feed the wolf and coyote and bear, and have you noticed, Hinray, what a pest those little fellows, the prairie dogs, the squirrels, gophers, all seed-eaters, got to be when they weren't

kept down naturally? Seed destroyed, bark eaten."

"Sure," assented Hinray gloomily, "and now they're gone, some other pest'll follow. They's an awful lot of life in the forest that the laboratory ain't taken account of yet, but Nature knew how to keep 'em down."

"Well, so long, Hinray. I have to get back and complete my map tonight; timber estimate, fire hazards, burned-over areas, the best site for an auto camp on the lower branch of the Amarillo."

"Them's more'n ranger's duties, Damon," said Hinray warmly; "you'll be gettin' a supervisor's diploma."

Damon flushed and shook his head. "I don't seek any office work, Hinray. I'm not aiming to get away from the forest. I wouldn't change a saddle for a swivel chair or a throne."

Hinray nodded. "I'll be off." He picked up pack and saddle bags, got his horse that grazed near, and rode away.

Dawn was riding up the trail to the Corona meadows. Piñon stepped jauntily. Whitey bounded ahead, to one side, and around them. Now and again the collie would leap to the chestnut pony's back and balance on the saddle before his mistress.

Dawn was singing lustily, with a sweet boyish voice. It was spring, early June in the Rockies, just three months since she had floundered through the drifts, or swept over the frozen summits on her snowshoes. The forest still bore the bright, varnished look of new buds, and shiny baby leaves, unsullied, untouched by bug or blight. The spruce wore two ravishing shades of green—the silvered bluish color that distinguishes it from the other trees of the forest, and the light leaf-green of its new tips.

The trail that Dawn followed was steep but unusually smooth, a well-made path built by her father and Hinray Dorsay. She was on a mission that suited her: to guard the mountain meadows. She came to the top of the trail and reached a level path winding through an aspen glade, where brilliant bits of darting color proved to be hummingbirds, and the mountain bluebirds flitted like detached bits of sky. The spotted twin fawns of the rare white-tailed doe held motionless within their laurel covert. In a cave's mouth a pair of lion cubs tussled in the sun, noiselessly; but the cave where each year two grizzly cubs had rolled was still more silent. Scraps of hide and a few bones near the entrance where the cubs had whined for two days and

nights, growing hungrier and hungrier, told Dawn their fate.

The brilliant Rocky Mountain woodpecker and the golden-crowned kinglet flashed through the trees. Delicate fern uncurled in the little copses and meadows which Piñon's feet threaded daintily. Bluets and bloodroot, late anemone, jeweled the fine grass and the brink of the torrential streamlet. It was a fairy land uplifted to the sky. The tips of its pointed firs were often in the clouds.

Dawn greeted each old acquaintance joyfully. The young leaves danced and trembled on the trees, so that the air seemed in an ecstasy of movement. From the berry bushes the warbling vireo lifted his voice, the bright-throated scarlet tanager dallied with his golden-breasted mate. Soon they would be on the wing to lower climes, but for this brief season the enchantment of the aspen grove was theirs.

Now the copse was behind Dawn and she had still higher to climb. She was above the heavy forest, and the barren mountain thrust through before her. The trail dropped to a narrow shelf which skirted the mountain. Above her the shallow-rooted hemlock found precarious hold in the fissures of rock and on the thinly covered surfaces. Below, the moun-

tain fell away into a vast valley which was only a cup in the system of the great range.

The trail wound up through a dark and heavy rim of trees that stopped abruptly: timber line. Dawn, Piñon, and the collie traversed the flat rocky height silently, solemnly, and it was not till they dropped down and down, over rough going for even a mountain pony, and emerged on a sunny crest, that Whitey's tail again wagged and Piñon frisked. Below them lay the meadow of the Corona. Dawn gasped. It was crowded with white stock.

"Goats!"

Who had put goats up here? This was what Dad had heard of. Could such a permit have been allowed over his head? He himself would never hear of opening up this part of the range, so far outside the Gonzales' pasture, with its new and tender growth, so carefully guarded since the terrible fire six years ago.

"It can't be Gonzales. He hasn't that many goats, and we would have heard if he had bought goats. It must be some newcomer. Well, here's where they move on! Come on, Piñon, Whitey, go get 'em!"

With a shout she was racing down the slopes, her knees pressing close Piñon's warm, shiny sides. The

horse took the steeps superbly. When a fissure yawned suddenly in the earth before them he took that too without hesitation, as readily as a bird the air, sailing across a ten-foot jump all in his stride.

Below them the goats were beginning already to run, baa-ing nervously, trampling one another, climbing into trees, up on rocks. There were perhaps two hundred of them, and no shepherd was about. Dawn rode back and forth around their flanks, trying to turn their heads, get them started in the other direction. Whitey was barking back and forth, nipping heels here and there.

"Herd them, Whitey, herd them! Chase 'em out, Whitey! Attaboy!"

The collie was delighted and raced forward and back across one end while Dawn and Piñon herded the other. In five minutes the goats had turned their beards and were persuaded to advance down the mountain in the opposite direction, amidst a bleating and ma-aaa-ing that filled the air.

As they fled they left the sloping meadow a pulp behind them. The mountain grass that remained uneaten was ground into the soft rich earth; not a flower starred the once lovely lawn; the young trees were almost stripped of leaves and even of bark as

high as a grown goat could reach. A swarm of locust might have swept it, save that then the earth would not have been plowed up by the hundreds of sharp little hoofs.

Last autumn Dawn had come upon this meadow full of piles of poisoned prairie dogs and gophers, their soft, limp little bodies heaped five and six feet high. This devastation was even worse. What would happen now was that the rainfalls would furrow through this soil and tear their way down the eastern slopes to cut old Johnny Marston's homestead crops to ribbons and then dry up in the desert. Dad had described it all too often. And hadn't they *seen?*

She rode full tilt after the routed flocks. The slopes over which they retreated were as bad as the meadow. There was no shepherd about. The flocks had been turned loose to go where they would. Steadily, persistently, Piñon and the white collie pressed back and forth behind the bleating trespassers. Up over a slope, where the vegetation changed to a sparse undergrowth of cedar, down through tall pine, they retreated at least a mile, when they came to a fence, the pasture. The gate was down. Outrage! The bearded old billy and the bellwethers went scurrying through, assisted by

Shep, while Dawn pelted the stragglers, still snatching at distracting leaves, with the stones which she had loaded into her saddle pouch.

When the last goat had passed through the gate she rode in, dismounted, and was pushing it to when two herders, a Mexican man and boy, came riding through the pines from the west end of the pasture.

"What you do?" the man demanded angrily. "What business herding the goats?"

"They're out of pasture, and you know it. You work for Gonzales? No? For whom then? *Quien?* Well, you'd better know!" Dawn grew more and more defiant. "That pasture above is ruined. Little you care, though. It is *not open for grazing. Sabe?*"

She had drawn near to Piñon and now mounted quickly. The Mexican herders sat on their horses facing her, silently, inimically. Suddenly the man dismounted and walked quickly toward the gate. Quick as a flash Dawn wheeled Piñon and reached the gate with a bound. She stooped and passed about the posts the stout chain that dangled there, endeavoring to fasten it with a padlock. Her fingers trembled so that she could not adjust the lock.

The Mexican broke into a run, yelling. He was cursing and threatening her. Dawn struggled to slip

the padlock through the links and snapped it to just as the Mexican reached out to it. Digging her heels into Piñon's belly Dawn tore down the slope with Whitey a lap ahead. The two herders regained their horses and were close upon her heels.

The enclosure was fenced right down to the shores of a little mountain lake. There was no way of getting out of the pasture except to jump the fence, which the herders might also do. As there were two of them they might cut off her retreat. That wouldn't be exactly disastrous—she could throw away the key to the padlock, which she still carried; but it would be ignominious, and the possibility did not enter into Dawn's plans.

Piñon had outdistanced the other horses and now emerged from a fringe of underbrush that skirted Snow Lake on its eastern shore. The bank was so steep that the chestnut pony was sliding on all fours. Dawn pulled up his head and held him in for a moment while she examined the shore. Just as the goat herders broke through the bushes, scrambling afoot and flinging imprecation ahead of them, she pressed her heels into the pony's flanks and gave him his head.

Without a moment's hesitation he plunged into

the cold water, swimming easily, head and neck outstretched. There was nothing but silence from the shore they left behind them. The icy little lake, fed by melting snows, the natives regarded with superstition and fear. Dawn could feel the sharp cold of the water even through her oiled boots. The collie had lingered a moment on the shelving shore. Now, with a look of resignation, he plunged in after them.

To a young man sitting on the far side of the lake this drama presented a striking picture. The dark green of the forests had parted for a nymph in fawn color, astride a sleek dark horse, and a bounding white shepherd dog, whose sharp barking came startlingly over the water.

The young man watched them emerge from the shadow cast by forest and peak upon the mirroring lake, and move silently through placid sapphire waters, disturbing them only with the ribbon-like ripples that flowed from Piñon's neck.

Garen Shepherd was fascinated. Now he remembered the white figure flying over the snow last winter! The pony and rider were already near the bank. The chestnut rose up out of the water suddenly as his feet touched bottom. He lost the treach-

erous footing, submerged, and rose again. Emerging on a tiny, white-pebbled beach, he stood politely while his rider slipped from his dripping neck. Her laughter echoed with a thin clarity across the tiny lake and back again, to the discomfiture of the outrun, outwitted men on the other shore.

Dog and horse were shaking themselves efficiently, and the girl retreated to the rock. She almost stumbled over Garen Shepherd, who had risen, hat in hand, pipe removed from his mouth, smiling broadly. She had not seen him, and was more taken aback by this encounter than she had been by that with the trespassing herders.

"Who are you?" Dawn demanded, almost panic-stricken.

CHAPTER III

AN OREAD OF THE ROCKIES

"Another Shepherd, by the name of Garen, at your service," the stranger replied. "And may I inquire who are you?"

Dawn merely stared at him, overcome by shyness.

"I'd have thought you just the spirit of the lake," the young man continued whimsically, "except that I saw you come down through the forest. You must

be the guardian of the whole mountain, eh? An oread."

He stopped, for the girl began to shiver. She was wet to the waist, for Piñon had fumbled for a footing before he found the little beach. The stranger snatched up the woolen blazer on which he had been sitting and offered it to her. Dawn managed a "Thank you" and took the wrap, still shyly. She sat down with Shepherd on the hot rock in the sun.

Had she called the sheep herders any bad names? Had she jeered when they threw stones and missed? At remembrance of the fight her indignation mounted again. She burst warmly into explanation.

"It's the goats. They're the worst! I like them all right, only they do so much damage. I'll teach those fellows to break pasture. They're always letting the bars down and leaving gates open. Folks aren't satisfied with the range we give them; want to crowd the pastures with cattle, and sheep and goats that cut the cover all up. Ruin the Reservation, that's what!"

The man noticed that she spoke possessively of the mountain—"the range *we* give them."

"You belong to the mountain?" he queried superfluously.

"Damon O'Neill's daughter," Dawn said proudly. "But I guess you don't know either why it makes a forester so mad to see mountain meadows all cut up."

"I've an idea," the man replied, "but suppose you tell me. I've heard that Damon O'Neill and his daughter know more about the mountain than God does."

He was studying the girl's profile; strong straight nose, a trifle short; a full-lipped mouth, a full, rebellious chin. A student of natural things, this Shepherd, and Dawn O'Neill was as natural and unspoiled as the mountain itself. And unlike the wild creatures of the forest, she had no fear.

Her golden skin deepened to vivid color below gray eyes that were wide apart and accustomed to looking, and seeing, far away; very clear eyes, rested with looking into green depths, protected with lashes made thick by the sun, and with serious straight brows. Her hair was cropped in rough locks, short at the back and wind-blown about her face. It came to a point on her forehead and silky down grew over her temples.

Garen noted the high, wide cheek-bones, the firm, full jaw, the well-modeled nose that just escaped

being too wide; they meant balance, physical endurance and strength, he decided. Her mouth was generously wide, and lovely; as lovely as her laugh. He wondered if she had a mind as naturally fine and strong as the body of which she was so unconscious. She had begun to answer the question which he had already forgotten in his absorption.

"You see, these are the only forests in this dry country; up here on the mountain reservations. And all the streams and rivers are fed from the mountains, so if the slopes are destroyed and the grass and sod all cut up, why, then the run-off of water is something terrible and tears down all at once. Then there's floods below and hell to pay. And no water left up here to keep feeding the streams till the next rain. Besides"—Dawn had scarcely drawn breath—"it ruins the new forests we're buildin' up." She stopped, conclusively, and Garen Shepherd was impressed with the clarity and brevity of her explanation. She'd been brought up on this.

"So you're the guardian of the plain as well as of the mountain," he replied. "I think after all you are a naiad instead of an oread. You are surely my patron deity then, for water is what we pray for, we Irrigation fellows. That should make us friends."

Dawn turned to face him and for the first time looked directly at her companion. She had been perfectly aware of him, however, had taken him in the moment she accepted his blazer. Now she thrust out her hand suddenly,

"Shake!"

Garen Shepherd got as strong a pressure as any land-office commissioner from a homesteader. His fingers tingled. A pleasant warmth that was not from the sun pervaded him.

"Yes, I guess you fellows understand," Dawn was saying. "But those men in Washington, they put us up here to take care of the forests and then they let people try to steal 'em right out from under our noses! Forest isn't just forest," she explained condescendingly; "it's streams, and holding spring floods back, and well-water and range for stockmen too."

"When we get through down below," Garen Shepherd's gaze was afar over the mountain top, "there'll be room for 'most every one, and water for them too. We'll catch and hold all you spare us from your mountains and fill the desert with the perfume of alfalfa blossoms and the buzz of honey-bees. Mil-

lions of tons of water will be behind that giant dam when it is finished. Think of that!"

The light of a vision was in the engineer's eyes. Already he could see the desert blossoming with meadows where white-faced cattle stood knee-deep in grama grass. Dawn's eyes widened. "I would sure admire to see it," she answered generously.

"You shall." Shepherd turned eagerly. "Surely you shall. I'll show you over myself if you will come down sometime. Senator Grange, his daughter, and their party were there last week, and we're having visitors from different spots in the world all the time."

"I've got to be starting," Dawn remembered. "My father will be worried if he gets back before I do. And I've my lessons."

"Your lessons?" Garen Shepherd was loth to leave the sun-warmed rock, the talk.

"Yes, I haven't finished my studies for this spring. You see, I'm going to college next year, and I study every morning after I've done my work round the cabin. Damon hears me at night, when he's not too tired. He's been my teacher always. Oh, yes, I *have* been to school. I went a couple of times, but I couldn't bear it.

"Dad took me the first time when I was six, to a convent. He got as far as the door!" She laughed joyously. "He turned around and saw my face. I didn't cry, mind you. But I guess I was a coony little thing just the same. I reached out my arms and he stooped down and held out his."

"And didn't you stay?"

"I never let go of him, nor he of me. And he'd paid the money down, mind you. But he didn't stop for that. We started and never stopped till we got up to the Cascada. Next time I didn't go till I was twelve. That was three years ago last fall; I'll be sixteen next month. I *hated* sitting on a hard bench shut up in a room all the time!" She shuddered at the remembrance, but in a moment her laughter came bubbling forth again.

Shepherd thought it the most refreshing laughter he had ever heard, spontaneous and naturally musical.

"That is wonderful. Yet you are going to college next year," he said, impressed. "How have you managed?"

"Damon knows a great deal of book-learning," Dawn replied, "and he's got a notion that it's books, not schoolrooms, that teach us. So he's taught me

after his own ideas, and we're nearly ready to pass the examinations. I have to do that to study under some great teachers that Damon has heard about. I'll be having to take a special course, of course, because there's only certain studies I'm good in. I'm not interested in the others. Dad started me on geometry last fall, but I burned the book up." She shrugged defiantly. "So we didn't get ahead much!"

Shepherd, having caught the infection of Dawn's spontaneous merriment, laughed till the tears rolled out of his eyes.

Suddenly she leaped to her feet, whistling to Piñon who browsed near. The sorrel came trotting up. Shep leaped to the front of the saddle, and Dawn swung into the seat without putting foot to the stirrup and was clambering away over the rocks without farewell or ceremony. In the mountains one goes when he is ready.

"Here! Hold on," shouted Shepherd. "I'm coming too. Can't I ride with you? I go almost all the way."

"Sure," she called back. "The trail's free." He had to catch his pony, tighten the saddle, grab up his duffle, and hurry to overtake her.

Never had spring seemed more lovely. Never had

the mountain been half so beautiful. The aspen groves were like a thousand shining arrows shot into the ground from the sun, each bole a shaft of light held by the gleaming surface of silver bark.

"Some old bear has made its own blaze here." Shepherd pointed to an unusually large aspen, the satiny bark of which was scarred with the fresh rips of a grizzly's great claws.

Dawn reined Piñon up sharply. The pony stopped, sniffed the air with widening nostrils, snorted and trembled.

"The grizzly's been here not long ago," Dawn said in a low voice. "Piñon smells it."

The white collie was dashing about in the underbrush, beating this way and that, to pick up the scent.

"A grizzly will sharpen its claws like that," Dawn murmured, "and when it's hurt it will sometimes tear the bark to ribbons."

Suddenly she wheeled Piñon, and cutting through the grove, disappeared into a glade below. Shepherd looked after her in surprise and followed slowly. The glade was blocked at the upper end by a wall of rock, once a waterfall's course, at the foot of which Dawn stood beside a pile of stones. In the

center, Shepherd saw, lay the remains of an old ram's carcass, half of which had been devoured.

Dawn's look was one of acute distress. "The bear has eaten poison bait," she said.

"How do you know it was poisoned?" Shepherd asked.

"I know it was. I—I dragged it down here just two days ago and covered it myself so's nothing would get it." She began to weep. "The bear was suffering when it tore the tree and has gone away to die."

Shepherd took her arm and tried to pull her away from the gruesome sight, but she began to cover the ram with rocks again; so together they piled up a cairn that even another grizzly could not tear down. He did not ask any questions, and when they went back to their horses they mounted silently and trotted quickly away, out of the shimmering beauty of the grove. They emerged into a stand of high yellow pine and cantered over the springing russet carpet, a foot deep in pine needles, for a mile or more. At length, as they breathed their groaning ponies at the top of a sharp hill, Dawn spoke:

"You're not going to tell, are you?"

"Tell? Tell what? You know, Miss Dawn, you can trust me."

She nodded, and pointing down through a clearing in the trees, showed him a mountain homesteader's tidy place. "That's old McGuire's homestead. Follow me and I'll show you something."

She was off at a wild run, following the ridge above the homestead. When they drew together again, horses and riders were both panting.

"Do you see a big pine through that gap?" Dawn pointed across a canyon to a ridge on the opposite side. A heavy stand of spruce and pine covered the slope, through which patches of white quartz gleamed here and there. "A great big pine that stands out above the others?" She hung breathless on his answer.

"Why, yes," Shepherd replied. "I seem to see a big one on a crest there. Of course. Now it stands out quite plainly."

"I knew you would be able to see it," Dawn said with satisfaction. "Some day I'm going to chop that tree down. It's a very old tree, and I want you to be there to witness it. Will you?"

"Delighted," Shepherd grinned. "What has the tree done to you?"

"You don't believe me, do you? You're making fun of me?"

"Certainly I believe you. I'll even help chop the tree!"

"We're friends, aren't we?" Dawn asked solemnly. "I'll help you, and you help me. I've promised some other friends of mine to help them. It's the Pueblo Indians of Picuris. They come up here every spring to the source of their waters. It's sacred to them, you know, and now it's all to be taken away from them. It's on a part of their Reservation, but now a new survey's been made, 'way this side."

"Yes, I've heard about that." Shepherd nodded.

"I'm going to prove the old survey," said Dawn with determination, "and I'll need a witness when I chop into the Silverstake Pine—that's what they called the old boundary pine—for we can't take the tree into court, and who can tell what may happen to our witness when we are not there? It's an overgrown blaze we'll be finding, you see, if I'm right."

They took the trail again, dropping down into the canyon. Piñon chose his own path without any direction from Dawn, who had tossed the reins loose upon the pony's neck and sat half turned in the

saddle, calling back to Shepherd. He followed as close as his pony could travel upon Piñon's heels. The sorrel chose the best trails with sure knowledge, but when it came to a choice of direction and Dawn did not at once lay rein to right or left of his neck, Piñon would bob his head like a circus horse, impatiently demanding his mistress's wishes.

"You must know every foot of the mountain," Shepherd called. "I wish I knew it as well. I spent all morning trying to find the source of the water in that lake where we were. I wish I knew where it all comes from."

"We're right under the source of some of it, Mister," said Dawn. "It rises up above the pine I just pointed to, and iffen—there, I get that from listening to Hinray so much—*if* you're sound of wind and limb I'll take you up. No wonder you couldn't find it. No one can. And the water that enters the head of the lake comes over a falls and above that must gush from the mountain itself. No one's ever found where. It springs from the living rock, Dad says, cold as ice. And I know two places where streams flow underground and disappear!" She offered this as very choice information. She was not disappointed.

"I'd love to see it," Shepherd exclaimed eagerly. "Will you show me? When can we do it?"

"Reckon maybe we could now," Dawn replied, glancing at her wrist watch, which she verified by the sun. "We came right smart there for a space. This short cut has brought us right beneath it. It won't take more than a half hour."

A quarter of an hour later they stood panting upon a summit that seemed the top of the world; yet it was a good deal below timber line, for far opposite they could see at a much higher elevation on the slopes of the Truchas the dark border where the tall timber was halted by the hand of Creation. Above them a lacy fall of water hurled itself musically over rocks so beautiful that they seemed painted. The water fell some thirty feet into a great natural basin fringed with maidenhair fern. It trickled gently over the mossy edge and down the mountain side in a diminutive stream.

"That isn't all of it?" Garen Shepherd pointed to the tiny trickle.

Dawn was smiling with delight. "Look." She led the way up to the face of the rock, caught Shepherd's hand, and ducked beneath the lacy whispering veil of water. The Irrigation Engineer found him-

self in a cavern of shimmering green light, exquisitely, strangely lovely. Above the tinkling of the waterfall a rumbling murmur became apparent. The murmur grew on the ears until it became a roar. Dawn was pointing.

At their feet a stream, the greater part of the water that came over the falls above, flowed backward into a cavern and disappeared, back into the living rock of the mountain, to flow below the surface on its way to the sea, at what depth no engineer could guess, to water the deep-searching roots of what desert bush, to well to the surface from depths of a hundred, a thousand, feet, at the bidding of man.

Shortly afterward they stood again in the yellow light of the outer day. Dawn was beaded with drops of spray like moonstones.

"No one knows where it goes," Shepherd said thoughtfully. "Do you know that too, Miss Dawn?"

She shook her head quizzically. "I know where one sunken river comes out."

"How does this tiny stream feed the Cascada to the south, the lake to the east and the stream that branches through McGuire's to the west?"

"Why, there's a million sources, not just one,

for each stream. You know that. Come." Pulling at his hand, she scrambled down the slope, showing him where here and there tiny trickles sought their way down to join a stream below. The deep moss and the felted carpet beneath them, a six-inch humus of rotted leaves and vegetation, was saturated as a sponge with the moisture of spring rains. A thousand little reservoirs had swelled into the cups and basins formed by the roots of trees, purling gently over to feed with economical regularity the boisterous Cascada that would eventually reach the sandy flats of a great river a hundred miles below.

An hour later they were trotting down a mountain road toward the fork of the Cascada.

"I'm staying at Benty's," Shepherd told her. "But I expect to leave in the morning. My vacation's up. I may not get up here again all summer, but if I do I shall surely come over to the Cascada, if I may. And you must be sure to let me know if you come down to the city, for the cars from the dam site go in often."

They were nearing the fork, where the big stream of the upper valley was joined by the Cascada. A rider on a sorrel horse was waiting there.

"It's young Perry," said Shepherd, "lad from Kansas City, staying at Benty's with his family till their camp is set up. Nice kid."

He halloed as they rode down toward him. He was lost, bewildered, a trifle uneasy, overawed by the majesty of the peaks that hung, still frigid with snow, over the primeval forest.

"Hey, Shepherd," he called out in relief, "I got lost! Glad you came along."

The boy, who appeared to be about seventeen, looked with undisguised interest at Dawn. Shepherd introduced him.

"I'm pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr. Perry," she remembered to say.

"You live up the Cascada?" he inquired easily. "I could follow that without getting lost." The boy laughed. "I'll ride up tomorrow if I may." He bowed with an exaggerated deference.

"Miss Dawn's a wonderful guide," Shepherd put in.

"Maybe she'll show me the mountain," young Perry responded, looking eagerly toward the mountain girl.

As he rode down the mountain a few moments later, Jack Perry at his heels, Shepherd felt that

he had had a perfect experience. The day, the beauty of the mountain side, the girl's laughter ringing across the mountain lake, the cavern behind the waterfall—he fairly ached with the beauty of it. He felt resentful toward the boy who broke in on his thoughts.

"Some champion, that girl. Wills, Earhart, Ederle, rolled in one, eh? With looks. So these are the Rockies! What are we doing up here? Oh, my Dad's got in with a bunch that are going to develop. He's got big interests back of him.

"It's some country out here, but they're dead. Dad's interested in range, opening it up. He's invested in a cattle bank in the state, and he's got sheep and goats planted somewhere in these parts already."

"That so?" Shepherd looked at young Perry with interest. "Gone into the stock business, eh? Has he acquired any range?"

"You mean bought any ranches? No. I imagine the bank'll take over a plenty," replied the boy easily. "He's got a man running his stock for him. Some trouble with fool government regulations." He shrugged as though those were the least of a developer's worries.

So that was the way the land lay. Shepherd said nothing but looked thoughtfully at Jack.

"We might as well make the best of it," the boy confided. "Mother's got to stay in the West for her health. Might as well make something out of it while we're here, and open up the country."

"That was done long ago," Shepherd said. "Agriculture's the thing now. I wish we could interest people with money, like your father, in the irrigation developments, agricultural projects, you know."

Jack looked at him incredulously and burst out laughing. "Agriculture, in a land like this? Why this country's good for stock and nothing else."

They had reached Benty's, and although Garen was annoyed, he could say no more at the time.

CHAPTER IV

DAWN AND THE FOUR-FOOTED

The doctor had said that Mrs. Perry must go to the Rockies. She could not face another winter even in the Middle West. Her lungs were infected, and she needed altitude, ozone, sunshine, rare air. Mrs. Perry was pretty, spoiled, but somehow an appealing person.

She sat now on the veranda of the log cabin that squatted on the eastern slope of Amarillo Canyon. Before her reared the snowy peaks of the Coronado, rising above precipitous and wooded hills.

In front of the lodge a party was getting ready for a ride off over the mountains. Her husband, cigar in mouth, and dressed in the most correct of

sports outfits, stood critically surveying the saddling of his horse. It gave him the feeling of a sportsman to run a finger under the cinch and tell young Benty to put a martingale on the obedient little mountain horse so it would not toss its head.

John Perry was a self-made man who believed firmly in development. He had developed the dump grounds south of the suburb in which he had lived, and why not the mountains? He had developed his business in Kansas City successfully enough to catch the attention of the big fellows higher up. Twelve-per cent. interest had, several years before, attracted his capital to the banks of the cattle state. But lately his investment hadn't been doing so well. Since Mrs. Perry had been ordered west he had embraced the opportunity to take charge of his business personally, and had entered a bank of the metropolis of the state as president.

Young Jack was thoroughly enjoying the experience. An instinctive wholesomeness, the natural response of youth to outdoor pleasures, had survived the would-be fast pace set by his school crowd at home. Now he was artfully exhibiting his horsemanship before the group on the veranda, pulling viciously at his mild pony's mouth, causing her to

rear, on which he would pull her back smartly on her haunches, her front feet helplessly pawing the air.

"He's a natural horseman," Mrs. Perry observed with pride. "Do be careful of that brute, Jack."

"Where are they going? The Rio Cascada! I'm no wiser than I was before." Mrs. Perry laughed and shrugged, wondering if there would be any one left that evening with energy enough for a hand of auction. After an hour's preparation the party was off, cantering up the canyon road.

The horses' flying feet struck pebbles that bounded rattling down to the rocky gorge of the river beneath. As the road wound upward they slowed to a steady walk. Dean Benty, Old Man Benty's son, rode ahead with Jack. Mr. Perry rode beside a large powerful-looking man, who slouched in his expensive but carelessly worn clothes. Perry was waving his arms about and arguing earnestly.

"It's not been touched. Virgin, you might say. Needs development, that's all, Gershwin. The country's all right. Nothing to this hard times talk. They could get back all they've put into the cattle business if they'd just open up these mountain ranges to the full. There's been more rainfall the last few

years than formerly. Ask the forest service men; they know. What's that?

"No-o. Not much range left down below. That's true. Most of it's been taken up. But up here—why look at it! Range for the world and to spare!" Mr. Perry saw no flaw in his arguments.

"Difficulty is in getting in. Only a certain amount of range supposed to be leased to each stockman, and under certain conditions. Although my bank has done so much for the state, extending loans to the cattlemen, I personally could get only a small per cent. of the cattle, from that Bar A ranch that I've been trying to save, up here for grazing!

"If you hadn't got that motion by the committee to open up the Indian Reservation"—Mr. Perry had worked himself up into a state of indignation—"we'd have been up against it. The goats and the sheep we had to put over through Gonzales, an old homesteader up here, an old reliable. And that with the Indian Reservation shut away from the rest of us. Say, isn't that an outrage!

"Why, they haven't even cattle enough to fill a corner of it. Sure. I know you supported that bill all along. Going through next month for sure, you say? Fine."

Gershwin, the big man, conversed chiefly in nods and monosyllabic grunts.

"Temporary injunction," he observed, "opening reservation range to public. First come, first served. Think it'll go through all right. They're not sure of the boundaries anyway."

They had come to the fork of the Cascada. Here the trail crossed the stream, and so did the horses. By clinging ignominiously to his horse's neck Mr. Perry managed to do likewise.

"Don't hang on that way, Dad," shouted Jack from the other bank. "They'll think you're a tenderfoot."

"He is," Mr. Gershwin emitted succinctly.

When the crossing had been successfully accomplished Mr. Perry drew alongside Gershwin, who, in spite of his size, rode as easily and well as, one felt, he did anything that he attempted.

"We may have some trouble with these forest service fellows," Perry said jocularly, although with a trace of concern in his manner. "Sticklers for regulations, you know."

"I was born down yonder in Texas." Gershwin thrust a spatulate thumb over his shoulder, indicating that he knew the ways of the country.

They were cantering along a level stretch of the trail that led up to the forest supervisor's cabin. They could see Damon O'Neill from some distance, standing in his doorway with another man.

Damon looked down and saw them coming. He recognized in Gershwin a man born to the saddle, but Perry, by his insecure seat, he assumed to be one of the new city boarders down at Mountain Lodge. He turned to the tall Westerner at his side and resumed the conversation.

"I'm awfully sorry, James," he said regretfully; "I want the worst way to see you pull through. But your range down below is sure gone, old man. It's been grazed to the limit for twenty years; you know that. If you try to pull out of the hole by borrowing, expanding your herd, and renting more range, where will you be next winter?

"Even if you let your grass crop lie idle all summer, the range is cut up so bad, so little root or seed left, it's going to take several years for grass to take hold. It ought to lie fallow till the roots have clamped some of that desert soil down again. You'll get little hay off your range next fall. Certainly not enough for two thousand head."

"I'll sell enough of the two-year-olds and the old

ones in the fall to make out if you'll lease me an extra piece of mountain range for late fall," James urged, his deep-set eyes burning anxiously under his shaggy brows. "A summer here'll condition 'em into A-1 grade."

Damon slowly shook his head. "You'd have to go in that much deeper to buy winter feed for the balance. It's for your own good, James, I'm advising you. I can't understand the Cattleman's Loan offering to carry you for any more. I know the other banks are simply extending their old loans where necessary. Go slow till your range recuperates, till I can get further mountain pasture for you. As an owner of improved ranch property you're entitled to preference.

"Let's see—" Damon crossed to his map on the wall, consulting certain areas—"you've just brought your stock up from the oak-brush forage, eh? Salted them? Well, they can stay on the aspen-fir location till July 10. The season was so late this year we couldn't let them up earlier. On July 10 you can move them up into the spruce-fir belt. Keep your salt away from the streams, James. And try to draw your stock up to the west slopes with it. The forage will be well developed up there by that time.

"Who've you got to herd for you till then?"

James flushed. "I'll have to ride up every week myself, Mr. O'Neill. I've got a couple of kids, but I rightly need them down below, and I had to let two old hands and my foreman go this spring; the biz was too broke. It keeps me busy moving the other thousand around down below. I've lost a lot this spring too. About ten head already.

"Looks like the old Custer lobo got a few. Killed two mother cows and et the calves before they wuz born." He spoke bitterly.

Dawn had come in quietly and had been straightening the papers on her father's desk, sorting the mail. Now she spoke up quickly.

"Let me help herd Mr. James' mountain bunch, Damon, if he's willing."

James looked with surprise at the girl, clad in the riding-breeches, shirt, and mountain boots of the men of the service. The forest ranger smiled at the stockman's amazement.

"She's as good a cow-hand, James, as she is assistant ranger. I'm willing, if you are. She usually rides over that range once a week anyway. If you want she can help your boy move the stock in units."

"There's a hundred to a salt-unit," answered James a bit dubiously.

"All right. Dawn knows as well as any of us just how long a given meadow can support how many head of stock. She'll salt them to stay put for a month, two weeks, whatever the range'll stand."

The ranchman's face cleared. With a look of surprise and relief he turned to Dawn, slowly extending a hand.

"Well, young woman," he drawled, "that sure would be pretty of you, if you mean it. It would sure set my mind at ease. Cattle has pesky tastes and appetites. Sometimes seems they just naturally *craves poison.* And they sure can demolish young leaves before the time comes."

"Dawn is usually all for keeping the stock moving," her father smiled. "I never heard her offer to tend cattle before."

A swift attack of conscience had struck Dawn like summer lightning. Impulsively her sympathies went out to the man who had suffered from the animals of her mountain. She was partly to blame, springing traps, and all. What could she do? She must make amends.

The four who had been riding up the trail now

pushed through the trees into the open space surrounding the cabin. They forded the eager little stream leaping before the ranger's door and rode up to the stoop. James said a hasty farewell and rode off. Gershwin and Perry sat their horses, but Jack and Dean Benty dismounted.

Dean introduced his party to the ranger, Jack jumped up on the porch and held out his hand to Dawn. "Good morning, Miss O'Neill. You see, I did find my way up here."

He was very smiling, sure of himself, spick and span. Dawn did not like his manner. She let go his hand and leaned back indifferently against the wall. Fresh pink and white thing. Did he have bear's grease on his hair? No, most likely that perfumed stuff.

Their fathers were talking. Damon O'Neill listened gravely to the suave tones of John Perry. Surely they were at liberty to ride anywhere they wished. This was public domain. He was sorry he could not accompany them, but that would be impossible. He waved to the littered desk which could be seen from the door. A ranger's duties were many, and as he was acting at present in the capacity of assistant supervisor there was correspondence to which he

must attend. Range management was keeping him very busy just now.

Well, that was one of the very things they were wanting to talk to him about. Damon knew that very well; he had heard of Gershwin, of course. And John Perry was the new banker? He had banked with his bank for years.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Perry," said Damon sincerely. "You big banking men have a great responsibility on you this year. I guess they're all depending on the banks and on the forests."

"That's right, that's right," agreed Perry. "Wonderful country you've got up here. Wonderful. Don't know why they call this a dry country, with almost fifty per cent. of the area in forests like this. Water enough, grass enough, to feed all the world, I'd think."

Gershwin was, as usual, saying nothing. Time enough for talk. Orders would be received today or tomorrow notifying the forest supervisor of this section that the Indian Reservation was to be thrown open to the public, and by that time the rest of his cattle and sheep would be on the range. But he had other things in mind as well. Perry was talking to the ranger.

"No, much of the region is wild and very rocky," O'Neill was explaining—"almost inaccessible. For that reason there are several million feet of mature timber that have not yet been taken out. The cost of getting them to a railroad would be almost prohibitive.

"The old silver mines? No one seems to have located them since the Indians abandoned their early workings when the Spanish came. Pasture? Well, there is no more left open at this season of the year. There will be some open, under regulation, for fall."

Jack Perry spoke to the ranger. Couldn't his daughter go with them this morning as guide? Dean Benty had to get back to haul wood for his father. Would she be willing? Although she had told herself in the first five minutes that she despised Jack Perry, Dawn agreed to go.

Either she could take them the way she had ridden yesterday, or they could cross the Cascada right here, go up through the forest straight west, above timber line, and see the whole country beyond spread before them. Her tone made the latter course seem more alluring; so they chose it. In three minutes Dawn was ready, a new blue kerchief knotted about her throat, a suède leather coat tied to her saddle. The

white collie barked his delight at the prospect of running with them, but Damon called him back and he came with instant obedience, though he sat watching Dawn and Piñon till they were out of sight.

The trail led at once into the deep forest. There was a foot of springy tanbark beneath their horses' feet. Before Damon and Hinray covered the trail it had been slippery with mud at this time of year. The forest closed about them and the trail grew steeper and steeper. They were in a dark green twilight, through which an occasional shaft of sunshine pierced.

There was no sign of wild life or game in these primeval depths, although in a thicket not thirty feet from the trail a pair of mule deer fawns froze motionless, their large beautiful ears pricked forward. The horses had gone about a quarter of a mile when Dawn stopped to rest. There was a hard climb ahead. A ten minutes' rest, and they were at it again. Within five minutes they had entered the densest forest that the men had ever seen and were climbing almost at a seventy-five-degree angle.

The horses groaned, all but Piñon, and even he was shining with sweat and lathered where the cinch pinched his belly.

"Good heavens," Perry gasped with awe, "think of all this timber going to waste!"

"Cut it," Dawn replied crisply, "and most of the valley below would wash down to the sea."

They emerged suddenly into the open and found themselves on a rocky tilted slope. With difficulty they picked their way across the sky table, which looked as though it had been strewn with giant stone building-blocks in all kinds of rectangular shapes. They were brought to a halt at the head of a sheer escarpment that dropped five hundred feet or more to a meadow of parklike beauty. Gershwin took off his hat, as though compelled, unconsciously, to uncover before a power so infinitely beyond his own.

The valleys below them were dotted with cattle. At their right rose a peak that still harbored in its shadows a glacial bank of blue-white snow. Occasionally a cold breath blew down across their faces, alternating with the sun-heated air.

"Whose cattle?" Gershwin inquired.

"Most of them, I think, belong to a Mexican homesteader, Gonzales," Dawn replied. "Let the horses have their heads going down," she warned.

Jack sat awkwardly. Dawn knew very well that

he must be stiff. But he said nothing about it. "I give him credit for that," she thought.

Jack followed close on her heels as Piñon led the way down the ledge to where the escarpment sloped into another upland meadow. It stretched as far as the eye could see.

"You say you haven't enough range," exclaimed Perry, Senior. "What's wrong with this?"

"It's not ready yet for grazing," Dawn explained eagerly. "See, the ground is soft, and these flowers are not good graze. The forage cover is just breaking the ground—the bluegrass, the oats, the wheat you see here—and the browse plants are only in bud.

"We have to have deferred grazing here, because the cover needs reseeding. This range had been open for grazing for years, long before the Forest Service was established twenty years ago, and it's been burned over again and again by lightning fires. It slopes right down into the valleys; so it's an important drainage area into the Rio Grande."

"Help, help!" Jack laughed. "School's over for the year. You sound like a book. This is vacation, fun!"

Dawn looked at him witheringly. He must be

feeble-minded. "I never went to school," she said, "but three months in my life. This is my business and my fun too."

Perry laughed outright. Mr. Gershwin grinned, and Jack echoed him sheepishly.

"What is the scrub hillside way down at the foot of this range?" asked Gershwin.

"Juniper, Mister, likely. But I can't tell whether it's monosperma or occidentalis from California. They both grow round seven to eight thousand altitude. Both are durable light woods, used for fencing and—"

"You'd make a good witness, young lady!" Gershwin smiled. "Point is, it's not good forage, eh?" Gershwin was beginning to understand the meaning of scientific grazing. He was not above learning from this young girl.

"No, sir. Not very. Take the oak-brush type range of the foothills; not much vegetation there, it's been overgrazed so long. Snowberry, service berry, squaw apple, sagebrush, and a few wheat grasses, all hardy plants, with needle grass, butterweed, and bluebells.

"But in the aspen-fir"—she waved her hand—"lots of vegetation. I'll spare you the names, but there's all kinds of berries, flowers—see the sweet

cicely, the wild roses and geraniums, the honeysuckle and clematis above?

"Last comes the spruce-fir range, up around our cabin, about nine thousand feet. There you find more herbaceous growth in the open parks and less bush browse."

Jack was reduced to awed silence during this conversation. He had been filled with the importance of Mr. Gershwin anyway, and here was the big man listening respectfully to a girl, a mountain girl, and asking her questions.

Then he contributed a brilliant idea. "Let's eat. Have you all forgotten we carried grub!"

"No"—Dawn ignored such a thing as a pang of hunger—"you'll have to wait until we get down to water. There's a little stream down in that canyon if it hasn't dried up since the last fire here.

"Let your horse's reins loose on his neck, can't you?" she reminded Jack sharply, as they started down the trail that would lead them into the canyon. "You'll be sailing right out over this precipice if you don't stop pulling his mouth on the wrong side."

Mr. Perry hastily and meekly dropped the tightly clutched reins he held. They did not speak again till they reached the bottom of the canyon. Dawn

saw a covey of brilliant grouse in the piñon scrub but did not call attention to them. Jack produced from the various saddlebags the lunch Mrs. Benty had put up, and they sat down on the rocks to eat.

Afterward the men stretched themselves out with cigars, but Jack and Dawn wandered down the stream; at every turn it changed, now deep and swift, now shallow and sunny, with little flower-rimmed beaches.

"You're a wonderful girl, do you know it?" Jack blurted suddenly. He really felt that she was wonderful. His weaker nature was impressed with her strength of mind, her independence and character.

Unconsciously Dawn was relenting to a certain sweetness in Jack; and then, he was young. She yearned unconsciously for the companionship of other young creatures. A look of blond delicacy about Jack stirred a motherliness within her, whereas with her father she had striven always to be a companion.

Jack had a nice expression, she thought. But he had seemed cocksure of himself with everything till it came to the mountain. She chuckled to herself.

What was she laughing at? he wondered uneasily. Jack had been spoiled in school by girls of a different

mettle from this mountain girl. It had been too easy for him. The girls he knew were active, clever enough. But in the daughter of the mountain ranger there was a serenity, an absence of any attempt to charm or amuse, that was new. He could never have analyzed the vivid force of her, but he felt it as some strong electric current is felt.

Mr. Perry and Mr. Gershwin were hallooing to them, and they hurried back. The men had heard shots on the mountain side above and the baying of dogs.

"There must be a hunt on," Dawn cried. "The Government hunters are after lion. They were rounding up this mountain to get the old Custer lobo too. Come on!" She was resaddling Piñon, whose back had been cooling while they ate lunch. "We've got to get out of here, and we may catch a glimpse of them."

The men were delighted. This was something better than Perry had hoped for. They clambered up out of the canyon over a slope covered with russet pine needles, sparsely wooded and almost free of underbrush. The baying of the hounds came nearer.

Shots were closing in round the base of the hill. Dawn halted her party. "Get off. We'll have to sit

tight right here," she told them, "if we don't want to be blown to kingdom come by a stray shot. We've got right in the way of the hunt somehow."

She led the horses quickly down behind an abutment of rock, where the men crouched in safety, peering excitedly over the top. Piñon nickered suddenly and began to tremble violently. Head up, tail out, he ran up to where Dawn lay stretched with her chin on her hands. Without warning, and so swiftly that his yellow length was gone before they could speak, a mountain lion came bounding through the trees. With a leap he sailed through the air and over the escarpment of rock, within fifteen feet of them. Swift as he was, they saw for a clear moment his grace, his cruel head. His tawny flanks, his long tail, were stretched their utmost. Then he was out of sight, but they could hear the falling of stones down into the canyon as his great weight struck. Evidently he had lit on a shelf of loose shaly rock.

"Driven into the open," Dawn murmured. The words had hardly escaped her when a second shadow hurtled from the slight cover before them, a shadow that for a moment loomed but a few feet away, a grayish ghost with bared fangs and wide yellow eyes—and was gone.

Jack's face was blank with incredulity and amazement. His father and Gershwin had flattened themselves against the rock, a shade paler, thrilled.

"It's the great lobo." Dawn nodded to herself with shocked calm. "They said they were going to get him if it took all summer. They've got twenty men and fifteen dogs and rounded them in a lion to boot."

Her color had gone. Gershwin looked at her curiously. "Ain't scared, girlie, surely?" His tone was kindly but bantering.

She looked at him swiftly, contemptuously. She mistrusted him, yet she liked him. His wide-set grayish eyes, with strange yellow lights about the pupils—why, they were like the lobo's! A wolf's eyes, and his cunning; that was it. Now Dawn understood Gershwin. She laughed back at him.

"You know better'n that," she said.

"Gee, I want to get in on that hunting," Jack sputtered, coming out from between the rocks where he had taken refuge.

"I expect you could if you wanted," Dawn replied indifferently. "I expect Mr. Gershwin could manage that too." He probably couldn't shoot anyway; it wouldn't make any difference.

"Great guns!" Mr. Perry's teeth were chattering. "Those are the fellows that kill the sheep and cattle, eh? Why, they say a few years ago these predatory animals cost the state over two hundred thousand a year."

"Gee, there's the banker talking at a time like this!" interrupted Jack plaintively.

"Well, it costs fifteen hundred dollars to let one lion live a year," insisted his father. "Much as a man would eat. Think of it. That's gotta be stopped."

"Don't worry, Mister," Dawn observed with grim impertinence, as she gathered Piñon's reins and flung into the saddle. "Before long there won't be any great game outside a museum. Except deer. Fifty thousand big wild animals have been killed in less than five years. Makin' the world safe for mutton- and beef-eaters. Come on."

"I want to chat with this young lady a bit," said Gershwin, as he mounted heavily and followed after Dawn.

"Why, I've got friends who'd give a fortune just to get a look-in on one of these hunts," Mr. Perry exclaimed, pressing along after them.

"Bring 'em on," Gershwin rumbled. "I read that the skins alone have put two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in the U. S. Treasury in the last few years. Used to be the Government paid *us* a bounty for 'em when I was a lad."

"Well, I always did believe in private enterprise for developing rather than the Government," Perry replied with a wink. "The Government makes us pay its price for the timber we buy up here."

There was no chance for Gershwin to catch up with Dawn; she led them by a short cut that brought them out into the canyon of the Amarillo at some distance below Benty's place. Gershwin caught up with her as they reached the road.

"I believe you're tryin' to run away from me, young lady," he drawled, with a half-humorous glint in his eyes. "There's so much up here we don't half know about. It's a revelation to get with folks like you and your father." It was not without reason that Gershwin had become one of the suavest lobbyists of his political era. Dawn expanded, warmed unsuspiciously to one who thus showed appreciation for the mountain.

"Funny there's no minerals up here in these

rocks," Gershwin rumbled along. "Plenty in the other ranges, and copper in the deserts. Funny they never found anything up here."

"No one's ever tried," Dawn flashed. "Gold's where you find it, you know."

"I was just wondering, Miss Dawn, if there was anything to this rumor that there was silver-bearing quartz on the Indian Reservation?" It was worth trying out, to question the girl, he thought. Gonzales and others had shown him samples of first-rate ore from these mountains, but no one had been able to locate a body of ore. Maybe he could get something out of this girl. He'd make it his business to acquire the proper locations and claims no matter on what reservation ore was found. The girl's face was perfectly noncommittal, however.

"It would make a great difference to the Indians," Gershwin continued aloud. "The Government's bound to protect the interests of its wards, you know."

"And you bet it'll do it too, Mister," she retorted, "as far as the Forest Service is concerned."

"Mm-m. What would you say, I wonder, if I told you—?" They were walking at a lazy amble up the road, Jack and his father following about a

quarter of a mile behind, and Mr. Gershwin glanced sidewise at Dawn out of oblique eyes.

"What, Mister? Shoot!" Dawn turned her steady gaze on him and the wolf-like eyes turned aside.

"That your father"—he dwelt on the words—"had a claim staked on the Indian Reservation—what properly should be, and will be, the Indian Reservation when the correct survey is made."

"I'd say you were a liar!" Dawn blazed. She pulled Piñon up on his haunches and looked straight at the big man slouching in the saddle. "It's not on Indian ground; never was, and we'll prove it! Though if it were it would be safe enough with *us*.

"But all that range you're aimin' to open up is Indian ground and always has been. They're just tryin' to give everybody a crooked deal." Her voice shook; she was trembling with passion. A slap on Piñon's flanks was enough to send him off racing up the road.

A pebble from his flying hoofs struck Gershwin in the cheek, its sharp edge drawing a fleck of blood. He brushed it off as a giant brushes a gnat. He was smiling.

CHAPTER V

THE WITNESS TREE

DAWN had never been spanked. Damon O'Neill had evaded that bitter duty. She had never even been beaten at anything she undertook, and was like a bull pup that has never lost a fight and thinks the world is his. Damon was proud of her daring; he envied it, but he feared for it. The experience of his young manhood had put a mark on him. Though of physical courage he had plenty and to spare, he was cautious and taciturn.

Damon was not afraid to trust Dawn to the mountain; he feared to trust her to the world. The world had not treated him any too well. Yet he knew that the day would come when Dawn too must undergo her trial. For that reason he welcomed the coming of the Perrys to the mountain. For more than a month now young Perry had been a visitor to the ranger's cabin, his daughter's constant companion in her comings and goings.

Dawn bullied Jack shamelessly. She made sport of him, teasing, harrying, showing him up. He took

it all amiably enough, just as Shep took a poke in the belly from her teasing foot while he lay with his four paws up in the air.

"You're so good at figures, Jack," she bantered as they lolled on the cabin steps one afternoon, "and I don't pretend to like 'em. What's the rate of precipitation down into the Cascada when a cloudburst deposits an inch of water in ten minutes?"

They were watching Hinray laboriously trace red rings on a map to indicate to the Range Supervisor where the fire hazards were in their section.

"Ask him instead what makes Chiny a near treeless waste?" Hinray cackled spitefully. "Ask him w'y and w'ere Joseph said, 'Every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians.' And w'y the Prophet Ezekiel balled out the shepherds of Israel?

" 'Woe unto ye,' he says, says he, 'shepherds of Israel. Seemeth it a small thing unto you to have eaten up the good pasture, but ye tread down with yore feet the residoo of yore pastures?' "

"What are you balling me out for?" Jack complained. "Is it my fault nothing grows on your ranges any more but cattle, and they're dying? Whose fault is it anyway?"

"Well, the old-timers is mostly to blame, and

that's a fact," said Hinray sternly. "They just spread out in the public domain and grazed it all to death. Then when they got confined down to their own pastures they just naturally let them git wore out too."

"They'd like to make a Sahara of the whole state," exclaimed Dawn hotly. "Who was that French author Damon was reading out of last winter? He said that the Sahara used to be well watered and well wooded, but it was made a desert by the folly of man. Many parts of the Arabian and African deserts, he said, too, would be covered by forests if man and domestic animals were banished from them for a while. He says trees spring all round the watercourses, just like they do down on the ranges here, Hinray; you know. And grasses grow there, but the cattle of the Bedouins chew 'em off before ever they can seed."

"It's sure the truth!" said Hinray. "Git me the Bible, Dawn."

She darted into the cabin and came out with the worn old book. Hinray opened at a marked spot and read. "Second Kings, Chapter Three: 'Mesha, King of Moab, was a sheepmaster, and rendered unto the King of Israel an hundred thousand lambs, and an

hundred thousand rams with wool.' How's that for a sizable herd? But wait!

"First Chronicles tells how Solomon, when he finished the Temple, sacrificed twenty-two thousand oxen and a hundred and twenty thousand head of sheep. So, Mister"—Hinray turned on Jack—"you see what expansion brought that country to!"

"Help, help!" Jack shouted. "Here endeth the second lesson! Hinray reads the almanac and quotes it to me from cover to cover, and then you both quote the Bible. But how is it," he added with a warming spark of interest, "that the wild animals get off scot-free of these charges? Don't they eat their share of the range too? Or is that why the Rocky Mountain sheep got killed off, because they were too tough for mutton and they crowded the range?"

"Now you're talkin' sense, boy," Hinray nodded approvingly. "You got yore bean workin'. Fact is, though, wild animals *ain't* destructive. Their grazin' habits is conservative. Nature and experience must 'a' learned 'em."

Hinray had finished his work and was smoking his pipe, leaning back against the cabin. Jack was no longer listening; he was idly absorbed in watching

Dawn. He could sit for an hour and just watch her. Dawn was listening intently as she restrung her Indian leggings with new deer-hide thongs.

"The Injins never saw the buffalo returnin' south," Hinray droned on. "They used to think that they passed underground, or that a new lot come out o' the south every spring. Fact is, they went back by a different route every autumn from the way they came up. No, they never harmed the range none, and there was more buffalo, too, than they ever will be cattle. An' better eatin'. Men sure was foolish them days.—Looky here, Dawn, there's a bad spot, a sure trap for lightnin' fire. Show yore paw, will you?"

Hinray hung his unfinished map on the wall and was making ready to depart. There was fire in the forest, and Damon was putting down a rather bad blaze of uncertain origin. Dawn had been riding range on Hal James's cattle for the past two days and was resting today. Taking care of James's stock was an effort to make up, in part at least, for her responsibility in increasing his losses from wolves and bear.

Undoubtedly it was her fault, she felt, that his stock had fallen prey to the wild animals of her mountain. Pretty hard, she realized, with all the

range troubles below. She herded his cattle with wisdom and skill, and with passionate fidelity to a task which was also a service to the mountain. She rode early and late, spending hours at a time in the saddle. Jack had gone with her several times. He rode much better now.

James's cattle had thriven amazingly. They were fine stock and had fattened on the excellent pasture. Nor had the range suffered; as the season advanced Dawn had helped the herders move them up higher and higher into the mountains till now they were in the high parks on the upper Amarillo.

The weeks had dragged on and nothing had been heard of any action on the Reservation survey. The question was whether the new survey was to stand, or that made according to Ranger O'Neill's interpretation of the old boundaries. While the question whether the Reservation range should be opened was held in abeyance through the summer months, Gershwin's cattle fattened along with Gonzales' stock on the homesteader's leased range. It was range that he was entitled to if the cattle were his. But they were not.

Damon O'Neill was not blind to this, but there was nothing that he could do about it if his supe-

riors could not. He would obey orders and save his scalp. It was unthinkable, but there were ways in which he might be removed! He would antagonize no one as he went about his duties.

Mr. Perry had arranged with the Predatory Animal Bureau to go on one of their hunts, and had brought down a cat, much to his delight. But he could not make a party of it and bring his friends out to share in the sport. He'd have to arrange that for himself, he was told, so he went ahead, preparing for a big hunting party that fall.

Damon and Dawn had twice ridden over to the great tree which Dawn had been so sure was the Silverstake pine, inspecting it, debating whether or not it was the boundary of the ancient grant. Damon's survey brought the boundary some hundred feet north of the tree and there he had erected a stone witness, in default of a tree. Yet the lie of the land, and some doubt as to the interpretation of the old description of the grant, made him wonder. Damon's reverence for the forest and for the rules of its administration was such that he would not have felled the suspected tree. Those things went so slowly. He had no idea how to press them.

But there were women down in the capital who

did. White women who had become interested in the welfare of the Pueblo Indians; in their land and water rights. A bad summer for the pueblos of the Rio Grande had left many of them almost without crops. Before ever it reached their ditches the little water remaining to them was diverted by white settlers, Mexican squatters, homesteaders of both races.

But a voice had gone up out of the wilderness, and the power of press and of public sympathy had brought the matter of this new invasion of Indian rights very nearly to a head. Whose water was this? Whose land?

Meanwhile deep in the forest some great tree lifted its branches to the blue sky and bore silent witness of the source of water and the hidden wealth of the Rockies. Graven upon its heart wood was the testimony as to who should be owner of their treasure. Dawn was sure that she would find the witness tree.

CHAPTER VI

DEATH IN THE VALLEY

August was hot and dazzling. Even in the mountains the sun at noonday was more than one could bear with unprotected skin. Yet the rays of light invigorated the very bones with their magic currents of life. Dawn bathed daily in some mountain brook, where it ran deep between rocky files or where the swirling waters had dug a pool that hung clear over a white sandy bottom.

One hot Friday she abandoned the cabin and her fire lookout to Jack's care and recklessly flung away

on Piñon, ostensibly to look down on McGuire's range for trespassers. But coming back, she took the trail that led past a tiny lake lost in the cup of the peaks. She swam there for an hour in the cold water. The surface current that lay placid under the sun was heated so that it was no longer icy, but a dive down into biting depths brought one up pink and gasping and full of play.

Dawn kept her woolen bathing-suit to slip on when she came out. Then she lay warming and drying on the hot rocks. She would have none of Jack on these swims. She'd tried him once, but some unconquerable fear of the bottomless pools shook him till his teeth chattered. He could not nerve himself to a plunge.

"I don't believe that Garen Shepherd would be like that," Dawn thought as she wiggled her toes in the fine silvery sand that rimmed the sapphire cup of waters upheld to the sky. But of course he was no tenderfoot. What had become of Garen Shepherd? She'd been so busy that she hadn't had time to think of the irrigation engineer.

Had she made a mistake to confide so much of the mountain to him? Suppose he were to attempt

some engineering feat with the waterfall below the sacred source, or were to tell what he had learned that day! It was a terrible thought, and she shook it away impatiently as something too disastrous to consider, something of which the man could never be capable.

"*That* fellow would *fight*," she thought. He had a cleft in his chin that meant something. She did not put into words the knowledge that her father would not fight; she would have felt that fighting were not desirable if Damon felt it so. He'd take a last stand, Dad would, but he wouldn't want to defy. And Jack, he would run. That was right; he'd run. Yet she couldn't help liking the little cuss for all of that. Poor kid, he didn't know any better. What could you expect? Such a life as they led down in the cities!

Dawn had been invited down to the sportily outfitted cabin below Benty's where Mr. Perry had installed his family for the summer, but she did not enjoy it. She had thought she would, had combed her hair carefully, and had Hinray trim it round her neck. She put on a clean pongee shirt with a new tie. But when she sat on the veranda looking at Mrs.

Perry's manicured nails and high-heeled snakeskin shoes, unbelievably tiny they looked, she had become unpleasantly conscious of her own dusty mountain boots. Oiling with neatsfoot hadn't improved them any. Well, she had some pretty pumps herself, but did they think she was going to walk down the mountain in them!

She was thinking of it now as she lazed in the sunshine. No, she'd not go down there again. Rolling over to look at the sun, Dawn lay for a moment, eyes shaded, staring up into the cloudless sky. Her dazzled vision did not at once take in a haze that lay over the tops of the trees. Suddenly a column of smoke shot up, a slender spiral, but with unmistakable meaning. In a moment she was up, pulling on her clothes.

Fire! Beyond Gonzales' pasture and the lower lake. Beyond McGuire's even—and Dad in the other direction! Piñon sensed the reason for his being urged. He slid down short cuts on his haunches without drawing back. Within an hour he trotted down into the clearing on the Cascada, up to the stoop where Dawn tumbled off and raced to the persistently jingling telephone.

There was no sign of Jack about. She lifted the receiver from the hook. Her father's voice came over the wire.

"Yes, yes, Dad. Oh, I'm so sorry. Did you have to ring long?—I left Jack here. I was up on the west divide looking down at Gonzales' lease and I went swimming."

His voice came clearly. "I can't get away down here. We're beating back a slow ground fire that's very persistent. Started by heat lightning, I think. How's everything up there?"

Quickly Dawn told of the column of smoke in the northeast. "I was just hurrying to the lookout to signal you. I'm so glad you telephoned, Damon."

"That's over above the canyon that leads down to James's ranch," Damon replied. "There's some dead timber there in a small patch that was burned over years ago. I've been afraid of it. The scrub oak's very dry too. Well, I can't get away now. We're short-handed, as usual. I'll phone Benty's for help and you better ride over at once. Take the northeast trail from the head of Amarillo Canyon. Signal me from the northeast lookout if you need help. We've got our hands full here and over on the west slope too.

"Be careful, won't you?" His worried voice lingered on the wire.

"Surely, Dad. Don't worry about me. It's an easy ride; you'll hear from me by four o'clock, I expect. 'Bye."

She hung up the receiver, chained Shep to the stoop, setting a pan of water, some stew, and a dog biscuit near, and looked about to see if there was any message from Jack. Yes, a note on the desk. They'd phoned him that a party from home had arrived, and he had to go straight down to the cabin. Dawn read the note again incredulously. He'd gone away, from fire guard at the phone, because visitors had come!

She threw the note down impatiently, rushed into the kitchen for some bread or crackers to thrust into her saddle bag—you couldn't tell, she might be out all night—then down to the stream where Damon had built a cooling cabin over the rushing water. She was ravenous after her swim, but there was little time to eat. She broke two eggs into a cup of milk, tossed it down, and stuffing two bananas into her shirt, ran back where Piñon was waiting for her. Her slicker, she might need it! She snatched it from the hook inside the door, tied it behind the saddle,

and in a moment more they were off, trotting down the trail along the Cascada.

She made speed while she could. The ride was uneventful; she met no one. A slow steady climb up the steeps at the head of the canyon, then a rocky trail over the mountain side, during which she could no longer see the spiral of smoke which she'd spied from Lake Peak. But once in the clear at the top of the mountain she took out her field glasses, and as she brought them down to the right focus the purple layers of atmosphere were dispelled as if by magic, her sharpened vision pierced them, and she could see over one succeeding spur after another to where a column of smoke arose on the east slope.

Dropping down into a box canyon which was the only pass to the northeast slope for which she was bound, Dawn could still see the smoke ascending over the tree tops. The end of the Box Canyon was seemingly a solid wall of weathered rock. Dawn rode straight up to it and squeezed behind one of the rounded conical pillars that stood out from the main cliff. There was just room for Piñon's plump flanks to push through the passageway.

This trail was Dawn's secret, her discovery; it had been worn into grooves by Rocky Mountain sheep,

and by wild horses, in the days when the Cordilleran passes were threaded by those splendid creatures.

Dawn and Piñon emerged from this granite-walled passageway into a different region. The eastern slope of the mountain was rocky and barren. It had been devastated by fire and erosion. Only a few stanch cypress remained, the tree that is anchored to the rocks. The shallow-rooted hemlock which had formerly covered the slope had been swept away. These steeps swept sheer up to the mountain meadows from which Dawn had driven out the goats at the beginning of the summer. Above them lay the divide, but this slope was the sole watershed into the valley beneath.

Now Dawn could smell the smoke and so could Piñon. They made their way toward the ridge above a canyon that led out through the foothills to the plains below. A crown fire had swept through this region several years before, taking off the Engleman spruce and Douglas fir and leaving the stumps which Damon O'Neill had feared might take fire. These stumps were now smoldering down into the dried cover of the soil. The fire had eaten into what remained of the scant cover about the head of the canyon and might spread through the oak brush to

the yellow pines on the far side. Every stick was as dry as tinder.

As she dropped down into the canyon Dawn could see the little forest creatures scurrying from the smoldering area. The small stream which had flowed at the bottom of the canyon even in the driest times had vanished. She could see where the last freshet, that had followed the heavy rain in June, had torn its way, leaving new stones, a high water line, and nothing else. Dawn sighed. It was all gone, the life-giving water, into the thirsty plain below.

This stream had been fed gradually by melting snows from above, but now the slopes were furrowed with a thousand hurrying lines that showed where rain and snow water had torn their way down the stricken mountain to evaporate or rush to a burning end in the desert. The tragedy was plain to Dawn.

But how was she to stop this crawling fire? With a man or two it could be beaten out. She'd have to cross the canyon to get to the fire signal station anyway. At the foot of the canyon, where it widened out into the plain, she could see a faint thread of blue smoke. She pushed ahead. It came from a house. That must be James's place. It was closer than the fire signal station on the other side of the canyon.

Maybe James would be there and could rustle another man to help root out the burning stumps above.

There was a windmill pump turning fitfully as the slight breeze struck it. Surely there would be men there to beat out the smoldering fire above before it spread. James was a good fellow; strange he hadn't noticed the smoke himself and put out the fire.

Dawn drew Piñon up on the canyon's brink to take a quick survey. From the plains that stretched beneath them a hot breath came surging up. Poised almost motionless in the sky, some great condors hovered, waiting for a feast that was still alive on the desert below. An eerie cry from above drew Dawn's eyes upward. There, so close overhead that she could see its striped fantail, a splendid hawk was winging to the heights, in its talons a writhing rattler five or six feet long.

As she reached the bottom of the canyon Dawn urged Piñon into a canter, but he suddenly stopped and began to back.

"Steady there, old boy. What's the matter?" His legs stiffened and she knew from experience he was making ready to jump. In the moment of silence a

dry rattle sounded and there in the sandy bed of the canyon a great black-tailed rattler was coiled, swaying, ready to strike. Piñon side-stepped, and they raced ahead.

As Piñon clattered out of the canyon's mouth the James place lay before them. It was strangely quiet. Must be no man about; hard luck. But evidently the womenfolks were inside because smoke still rose from the chimney. As she let herself and Piñon into the corral Dawn saw stretched under the trough below the mill, where water dripped, another snake. After water, of course; dry weather when they'd do that.

She rode across the corral, thinking ranch women were always quiet. A few cattle stood about the trough, and Dawn saw that the reservoir was very low. There was little wind to work the pumps, fortunately at that time, on account of the fire. As she looked toward the house Dawn saw a strange sight.

A woman was creeping on hands and knees across the space between the sheds and the back door of the ranch house. Her head was hanging down, and as Dawn stared her arms gave way, and she fell on her face. Dawn found her voice and called out, but the

woman apparently did not hear. She struggled up to a sitting posture and dragged herself on. She reached the corner of the adobe house and disappeared under the porch while Dawn tumbled off Piñon and fumbled with nervous fingers at the corral gate. She flew through and ran after the woman.

Where was she? What could the trouble be? Fear clutched Dawn at the ominous silence. Plunging round the corner, she saw the woman ahead of her. She was on her knees before a window, peering in. Against her shoulder a rifle was pressed; she must have taken it down from the outside of the house, where so many ranch people keep a gun ready loaded, to use against wolf, coyote, snake, or unwelcome visitor in an emergency.

Now she was aiming it at something inside the house. Dawn was afraid to call. Something kept her from screaming aloud. She crept up behind the woman, who did not seem to hear her, and peered over her shoulder. What terrible thing was there? Little children played inside in the cool and darkened room. Two little girls! Good heavens, the woman was aiming to shoot them! With an involuntary shout Dawn threw up the muzzle of the gun,

then wrenched the barrel from the unresisting fingers of the woman, who fell forward at Dawn's feet, her half-glazed eyes closing.

Dawn caught her, laid her flat; the woman was ghastly pale. There had been two pails of water at the back of the house, Dawn remembered. She dashed around the corner, seized a pailful, which she threw over her. In her hip pocket was the thin little flask, long uncorked, which Damon had always insisted on her carrying. Whiskey. Thank God for it. She forced a little down the woman's throat, then more, till she gasped. Her eyes opened; terror lingered in them. She looked at Dawn heartbrokenly, pitifully.

"Too late." Her lips were stiff and she barely articulated. "You come too late. I been bit by a rattler. Big fellow." Her strength seemed to be returning slightly. Leaning sympathetically above her, Dawn heard the story in a few disjointed sentences.

Hal James, her husband, had gone to town to be gone a week or ten days. She'd gone out to the faucet above the trough to get some water. The cows were lowing and she hadn't heard any rattle; the snake had bit her from behind, in the leg. She'd tried to crank the old car, to take the babies and

make it into town. She couldn't. She felt that she was dying, and that the only thing to do was to shoot the babies first.

She couldn't leave them there all alone, to starve; just babies, all by themselves, cryin'. Afraid of the wolves and the coyotes. She'd scrawled a note to her husband, begging him to forgive her. Her anguish was pitiable.

"Tell James—take care my babies." Her head fell back against Dawn's arm.

Grief and fear came like a chill wave over Dawn. Was this to be death that she had come upon?—death that she had always hated. Oh, help, oh, God, help her! She lifted her eyes to the mountains. What must she do?

The mother's bare leg thrust out from beneath her calico skirt, the cotton stocking pulled down. An ugly red mark showed, two small indentations. That was where she had been bitten. Dawn pulled off her neckerchief and made a tourniquet about the leg several inches above the marks. She knew what she must do. In the corral a small branding-iron lay beside the gate. She ran and fetched it, and opening the kitchen door, went for the first time into the room where the little girls were playing.

Beans were simmering on the stove and a bed of hard burning embers glowed beneath. She thrust the iron into them. The little girls ran to hide in a corner and would not speak. Dawn spoke to them reassuringly. "I'll be back in a minute, honey," she called to the eldest; "stay right here. I'm helping. your mamma."

The iron was glowing in a few moments, and it took but a few moments more to burn out the poison wound. Damon had done this for Hinray once, and she'd never forgotten it. Mrs. James winced and moaned. More whiskey; the curved flask held more than you'd have thought. Well, that was all that could be done. Sudden memory brought her father's medicine shelf before her. What was that stuff Dad used? She could see the glass-stoppered bottle that stood there. Often she'd read the label. "Potassium Permanganate, rattler antidote." Into the house, a bedroom; she was searching for a shelf, a likely place. There, above an old bureau, were some dusty bottles. Boracic acid, compound licorice; a faded label, potassium permanganate! Just a little left. Tremblingly she dissolved it in a little water left in the pail, lifted Mrs. James's head, and poured it down her throat. She poured the last drop down the

unconscious woman's throat, lifted the slender body, not so heavy as her own, and carried her past the two terrified children into the bedroom.

The tragic accident was clear to her now. Since the canyon was dry the snakes had been coming to the trough to drink. Dawn went out to the children, who still cowered in the corner. "Well, honey—" she stooped down to the eldest, who took her hand shyly—"your mamma got hurt, but she's going to be all right."

"Going be all right?" the little girl echoed. She came out of her corner, smiling at the bright pretty face of the new lady; but the baby wept inconsolably behind her chair. They were pretty little things, with a fluff of light hair like dandelions. Dawn looked about for something to distract the baby. "You want some chocolate, honey baby?" She ran out and got a bar of milk chocolate from her saddle bag. The novelty and delight of this comforted and diverted the baby. There was very little furniture in the ranch house; the old stove, a few chairs, the clean-scrubbed table. The little white beds were spotless. The children too were clean; they were pale from the heat, but their baby faces were luminous with health and good care.

What could she do with them? Their mother might die, left here alone. Yet she ought to have help, a doctor ought to see her. But the children couldn't be left, and how could she take them? The fire! Dawn had not thought of it for the past hour. It must be past four o'clock now. What would Damon be thinking? He would be frantic. Through the door she could see a growing cloud of smoke over the foothills.

What could she do? It was impossible to take the mother. Piñon could carry herself and the little girls, but the mother could not hold on to the horse. Well, there were the children to be fed at any rate. The older one was announcing with shy confidence, "I'm hungry."

"What do you have to eat at night?" Dawn questioned.

"Milk. Mommy lets Dora milk the nanny. And eggs, or mush. Do you got a orange? My Daddy is going to b'ing us back oranges from town."

No, but she had two bananas still. The goat had come into the house. It was five o'clock and she wanted to be milked. She butted Dora gently. Dora ran to get her pail and knelt down beside the goat, milking her most efficiently, her baby fingers press-

ing a swift stream that pattered and foamed into the pail. Yet there was barely a quart. Nanny was going dry.

"You cunning!" Dawn knelt by the little girl and hugged her when she pronounced the nanny all milked.

Dawn went into the bedroom and looked anxiously at the mother. She seemed to be asleep now. Her face was flushed as with fever, but she lay quietly.

"I gave her quite a lot of whiskey after all," Dawn consoled herself. She fed the children and ate an egg herself. When she went out to the windmill to get another pail of water before dusk she stepped carefully. There were two snakes moving across the corral toward the trough, and in a corner a mangled shape. Either some cow had managed to trample it, or Piñon had caught it beneath his sharp little hoofs.

Dawn looked toward the foothills apprehensively. The bank of smoke was mounting, denser than it had been. It was a slow smudge; no telling when it might burst into flame. It wouldn't come down this way, for there was nothing left to burn, but it might spread back up, and if a wind rose—! She had for-

gotten about snakes, and there seemed to be an epidemic of them. Dawn returned to the house and told Dora and the baby not to budge through the screen door. She would be back in a few moments.

She took down the gun from the wall, where she had replaced it, and went back to stand on the side of the watering-tank. From there she shot four rattlers, big and little, and stoned one that she had not killed. It was not pleasant, but it made her feel a great deal easier. Poisonous things, hurting mankind. She hadn't thought much about that side of wild life before.

Piñon came nickering and she took him down to a cluster of giant cottonwood, the only trees as far as the eye could see. Their roots went deep and their branches were above the reach of animals. When she got back to the ranch house both children were crying.

"Wolf get you," Dora wept. "Coyote eat up my nanny."

"No, no," Dawn comforted her; "I won't let anything hurt you or baby or your mommie."

The baby kept whimpering for her mother. "I guess it's time for you and baby to go to bed now."

She must get them to sleep. Who could tell what might happen?

Dora was a biddable little thing and entered into the game to surprise mother by going to sleep before she woke up. After a long hour they finally did fall asleep. It was dark and Mrs. James was stirring restlessly, tossing with fever. Dawn took the only chair that was in the bedroom and sat beside her, bathing her forehead. She thought from time to time of Damon. Well, he would understand tomorrow. Maybe he would be able to come, or send some one to look for her.

Just before dark she went out to gaze longingly at the mountain. The smoke was mounting; no doubt about that. But now she simply could not leave these helpless creatures, no matter what happened up there. Fire on the mountain!

It was a terrible night. Dawn did not undress. She put a folded quilt and some pillows on the floor beside the young mother's bed, and kept watch there. It had been a long and more than usually active day for her, and she slept in spite of herself. During the night she heard the children's mother muttering and moaning and jumped up at once. She gave her a

drink of water and in covering her touched the injured leg by chance. It was very cold. Had she made the tourniquet too tight? She thought she had been doing the right thing but wasn't sure. She loosened the tourniquet.

Before five in the morning the children began to chipper like birds. Dawn woke, but was terribly sleepy. Mrs. James was still feverish, and as she leaned over her the poor thing opened bright eyes and rambled deliriously. She was afraid the mountain lion would come in and get her baby. She was afraid they'd lose the ranch and starve this winter; she wanted to go back home down in the Mimbres Valley and go to farmin'.

What would James do to her if she'd shot her babies? She sure didn't want to do it, but she couldn't leave them there to be scared and die by themselves. The woman kept tearing at the tourniquet and trying to get it off her leg. Dawn thought it might as well be removed; so she took it off. She bathed Mrs. James's head and pushed her back on the pillows. Soon she sank into a heavy stupor. Was this to be the end? Now Dawn could do nothing more for her; either she would get well by herself or die.

The nanny did not come around to be milked. Had she wandered away to browse in the foothills or had coyotes got her? Perhaps she thought it was time to wean the children. Dawn remembered how a goat she'd had used to butt her away, gently at first, then with quiet determination, when she tried to milk her. There were a few chickens in an inclosed yard, but not an egg in the nest, nor in the kitchen cupboard. Dawn found a little cornmeal and when she had kindled a fire she made the children some mush which she gave them with a little tin of canned milk that she found on the shelf and that proved to be still sweet.

When she went outdoors again she could see red fire in the mountains. Dawn was frantic. No one had come to their rescue yet, and now you could smell the smoke from the foothills. What a lonely place! When the children had eaten their breakfast Dawn tied on their little bonnets and took them out to the corral where she had already brought Piñon to drink. She was not used to human babies and handled them with the rough fondling she would a puppy or a lion cub. But they liked it, and were delighted when she set them up on Piñon's neck and mounted behind. She judged it was about eight o'clock.

Once out of the corral she started off at a canter but found that that would not do at all. The little things in front of her bounced about, one up while the other was down; they must slow to a walk. How long would it take to get to the signal station? Damon would see the flag from the eastern lookout.

As they went higher and higher into the hills the smoke became thicker and thicker. The fire was on both sides of the canyon at last, and from the thick humus of the south side the smoke rose like a dense smudge.

Dawn stopped to pull out the wet cloths she had stuffed into the saddle bag; she tied one across the bonnet of each child, covering its face. At last they reached the foot of the ridge on the top of which the station was built in a high tree. Obediently Piñon faced the ascent, although it was plain that he disapproved. When they reached the summit Dawn spoke sternly to Dora.

"Hold on to the horsie," she said; "don't budge. Sit right here on the ground and don't let the baby move while Dawn is up in the tree. Piñon will take care of you." She kissed the sober little faces looking out from under the cloths and caressed Piñon's neck. "Don't stir, old boy. Stay right here, *sabe?*"

Dawn sprang up the ladder and stopped only when she was so out of breath that she could not climb another foot. Ah, now she was getting above the acrid smoke that choked her. She reached the lookout nest, took the flag from her pocket, shook it out, and raised it to the masthead. She heard the baby crying down below. In her haste to get down she lost her hold for a moment and slipped, held by one hand while she got a footing again. The smoke burned her eyes and stung her throat.

When she reached the foot of the tree she found that the baby had slipped off Piñon and that she had taken off the wet cloth, and dazed by the smoke, was crying bitterly. The trip back was a fearful ordeal, worse than she had imagined it could be. She herself could not see the trail and in her anxiety became confused. Piñon lowered his head to the ground, snorting, but in spite of his fear of fire kept ahead. Had it not been for his surefootedness and sagacity they would never have come out alive. Dawn regretted bitterly that she had tried to put up the signal.

It would have been better to let the mountain side burn while they stayed at the ranch house. At least, there the babies would have been safe. She

felt a passionate responsibility for them. She had saved them. And she was still responsible for their baby lives. They were the most important thing of all just now—more important than the mountain.

Piñon was finding the trail by instinct. Dawn had difficulty in keeping little Dora from slipping forward off his neck as they descended the steep incline, with the horse's neck outstretched, nose to ground. At last, the bottom of the canyon; Piñon broke into a run. They raced the last mile down to the ranch house, Dawn holding the baby tightly before her, while with the other hand she grasped Dora, whose own dimpled hands clutched the pommel firmly.

The corral gate! They had been gone several hours; it must be nearly noon. Dawn lifted the children down; carrying the baby and dragging Dora by the hand, she flew toward the house. What would they find? She was almost afraid to go into the bedroom. Mrs. James lay pale and still on the bed; Dawn thrust Dora behind her, but just then the dark eyes opened. "Dodo, baby," the mother called. She was all right; weak, but normal, the poison vanquished.

She hugged the children to her silently, then

turned her face to the wall so that Dawn would not see the tears that flowed down her cheeks.

"I reckon I owe you a lot, girlie," she said thickly. "Seems like a bad dream. I sure am sorry to have put you to so much trouble."

Dawn's spirits lifted. "Trouble? I guess God struck that fire with lightning on purpose. 'Cause it's the only time I ever heard of a fire doing any good turn." She didn't say that if it hadn't been for the fire no one would have been likely to pass that way.

The mother told her where to find the cold cellar, where she had some fresh food and her canned goods stored. The trapdoor was covered by the couch so that the baby couldn't open it and fall through. Dawn got out salt pork, stirred up some batter bread, stewed the carrots.

The little girls were as content as kittens to snuggle beside their mother. They seemed none the worse for their ride, although they were very sleepy —one of the effects of smoke. While she minded the cooking Dawn went every few minutes to the kitchen door and looked anxiously toward the mountain. The smoke was growing denser slowly but surely.

She fed the children and put them on their little cots to sleep in the same room with their mother. Mrs. James dozed but took a cup of tea gratefully. Her leg was now painful and feverish. The warm afternoon passed; outside the sun was high, the desert listless under a dazzling white heat. About four o'clock, while she was watching at the door, she saw red glow. That meant that the fire had burst into flame. Well, there was nothing she could do. She would mind the children. The mother seemed exhausted and had again fallen into a stupor.

About five o'clock she heard the sound of horse's hoofs and rushed out, her heart pounding. Maybe it was Damon. But it was Hal James. He was covered with dust and nervously flung himself off his horse as he saw Dawn standing in the doorway.

"Afternoon, Miss. Anythin' wrong with my folks?" he blurted.

Dawn shook her head, smiling. "They're all right. But your wife had a little accident. I just happened to ride down here; I was on my way to the fire station."

They glanced toward the mountains. James had heard about the fire and had turned about and come home frantically; he had a lot of cattle loose in the

foothills. They went inside, and the cattleman sat with awkward tenderness on the edge of the bed, stroking his wife's hair. Not a word was said.

After a while he whispered to Dawn, "What you reckon's the trouble?"

Dawn told him about the rattlesnake bite and what she had done for it. He looked at the painful leg. After a moment he asked, "What were you aimin' to do, mother?"

Mrs. James seemed dazed by her experience. "I—I didn't know," she faltered, "that you'd be back before another ten days. I didn't rightly know what —to do. Tried to crank the old Ford; she wouldn't budge. I run around till I dropped. I was plumb crazy, I guess." She looked pitifully at Dawn. What had the girl told her husband. She put her hands over her eyes and tears streamed from under them.

"Nothin' to carry on for now," James said gruffly, squeezing her hand. "I guess Miss Dawn here saved things from bein' worse."

"Oh, yes, yes, she did," the woman on the bed gasped. "She just about saved me from puttin' a bullet through each of us. But I swear, Hal, I didn't aim to take the children with me. But what could I do?" She was in a pitiful state of shock and

terror, the fruit of long lonely days and nights, silent, isolated.

James sat with one hand over his eyes, the other holding his wife's. Tears rolled down his lean cheeks. What might he have come home to?

"You know," he said awkwardly after a moment, "those critters aren't what you'd call always dead poisonous. They'll kill a lamb, or a pig, maybe, or a child; but they haven't usually got enough poison in 'em to get a full-sized human. Leastways, not a man."

"I guess I was in a poor way, Hal," Mrs. James faltered. "It took a quick holt on me. And it was so warm. I guess I got frightened."

James nodded. "This young lady's whiskey did the trick all right—or maybe that's what laid you out, old lady?" And the shadow of death was brushed off with a laugh.

"I had to get into town," he told Dawn, "to arrange for extensions. I lost ten head of sheep the last few weeks," he said; "coyotes, and maybe lobo. When I was a boy the quail came right up to our door here. And the jacks. My father wouldn't let any stock pasture about the house. The coyotes were

afraid of guns and human habitations then. But now they're so bold—"

Dawn went out to look toward the mountain and see how the fire had advanced. It appeared to have died down, though there was still heavy smoke lingering over the foothills. Now she must ride back at once. There would be a bright moon tonight; she could find the way easily. James said he had to ride up after some strays anyway, and he'd ride a piece with her. Mrs. James's eyes wore a beseeching look as they made ready to leave her, but she said nothing. Hal had to think of the cattle first. He came back from the door and patted her head. "So long, mother, don't get up. I'll make it back soon's I can."

Dawn kissed the little girls good-by and rode quickly away. If she could go straight through she would reach the Cascada by nine or ten. If she had trouble it might be midnight or after before she was home. Why had Damon not come for her or sent for her? She was more worried than she had ever been. There must have been a long hard fight with the big fire on the other side of the mountain. That was the only reason, and Damon probably didn't even know that she was not at home on the Cascada.

Yet it was not like him to fail to have her signal watched for by some one. Thus debating and reasoning out the situation, they came to the canyon's end.

When Piñon scrambled up the last steep bit of the canyon trail, Dawn saw two figures above, rather hazy through the blue smoke that still lingered on the slopes, coming down the trail. One of them was Damon. Was the other Jack? To her surprise her heart was beating like that of a trapped bird.

CHAPTER VII

FIRE

It was Garen Shepherd who stood at Piñon's head, cap in hand, as Dawn released Damon from a kangaroo-like hug. Perhaps the Irish in her helped Dawn to recover from her surprise, her disappointment.

"Didn't you bring any water with you, Mr. Irrigation Expert?" she grinned, taking his outstretched hand. Well, it was rather nice seeing him again. She just hadn't been expecting him.

"I'm only an engineer, alas!" Garen was frankly smiling his pleasure. "And I don't seem to be able to engineer much."

Damon was exhausted, his worried face scorched

and smudged with fire-fighting. He had been more upset than he would admit at Dawn's disappearance. He himself had gone at four of the preceding day to look for her signal. Seeing neither signal nor smoke at the time, he decided that she had found matters not so bad and had returned to the Cascada.

He had fought fire all night and just before sunrise had managed a few hours' sleep, leaving the conflagration whipped. The fire brigade, made up of specially hired helpers and volunteers from the homesteaders and mountaineers, lay down behind the lines for a well-earned rest. Around ten that morning Damon woke, rode over to the nearest phone, and called his cabin. Hinray answered. He had been at the cabin all night. No, Dawn had not been home.

Then Damon had sent Hinray to Lake Peak lookout, from which point he had seen and reported Dawn's signal. The next half hour Damon spent calling the different stations for help. Having sent Hinray on ahead, he himself followed to the northeastern slopes. For five hours he and his men had been fighting fire in the ground—ever since noon. They had it beaten out now; just about licked, at any rate, thanks to Garen Shepherd, the four Bentys,

and a couple of summer folks who sure were *men* and had volunteered gladly.

"Let's get back up the mountain," Damon concluded the story. "I want to get a fresh breath of air in my lungs." He turned to thank Hal James for riding up with Dawn.

"Keep a watch on this side of the mountain, now you're back, James, will you?" he cautioned the ranchman. "Use the fire lookout on the other side the canyon to signal us. And say, can you ride over in the morning first thing and take down the signal Dawn left? This humus is as dry as tinder." Wearily he remounted Little Sorrel and turned her head back up the trail.

"Oh, James," Damon remembered and called back over his shoulder, "you can move your stock now, goats too, over to the far side of the canyon." They rode on. "That'll please him and help make up for the hard season," Damon explained in a tired voice to Shepherd, who rode between Dawn and her father. "It takes seventy-five acres to keep one cow alive down on the desert range, but the other side of the canyon's covered with scrub, fine browse, piñon, juniper, and acorns ripe by now—the best sort of

mast. That shows the wisdom of closing the foothill pastures for a while.

"The goats'll do it good too, for once. They can break up that rocky hard-baked soil with their hoofs so that when it does rain it'll soak in."

"Rain, did you say?" Shepherd laughed. "Does it ever rain anywhere? I came back up to the mountains to see if there was such a thing as rain left."

"I wondered what brought you," Dawn remarked, meaning to be polite.

"Well, not just the hope of rain, to tell the truth," Garen replied boldly. "If that were the sole reason I might have joined the Indian dances at any one of the pueblos down below, for they surely are working overtime at their ceremonies, being unable to coax water onto their corn any other way."

A light wind had risen from the south and was blowing the smoke away from them. As the air cleared the sun sank and they moved through an orchid twilight. The forest ranger was in a tired daze, but Garen felt vitally alive and happy. Dawn was more subdued than she had ever been.

Desolation and the shadow of death on the desert from which she had come, devastation on the mountain side. As the men talked her depression grew.

"Two to three floods a year now," Garen was saying to her father. "Everywhere that unsupervised cutting has been practiced. Fatal with this soil. Of course the problem this year is *no* rain."

Weary as he was, Damon could not let the statement rest undefended. "The average rainfall will be the same," he persisted. "True, this has been an extraordinary year. You can laugh! But usually at our elevation we have a light rain *every afternoon* during the summer. There hasn't been a drop for over four weeks now. But it will come. You'll see. Under natural conditions dry periods are easily tided over."

Fanned by the pine-scented southern breeze, they mounted the trail slowly. Gradually the violet light diffused into a mellow glow. The moon was out, riding full and high. Day had exchanged for night without darkness. They were going through the burned-over area and beyond could see the line that had been beaten out by the fire-fighters.

Damon, who was riding ahead, looked back, calling out to ask what had kept Dawn at the James ranch. He stopped to rest his horse, and Dawn and Garen reined up beside him. Dawn explained why she had been unable to put up the fire signal until

that morning. "Good girl." Damon's tired smile was guerdon for Dawn. "I'm mighty glad you happened by in time. James was trying to cheer his wife, but the things *are* deadly just the same. Many a grown man's been laid under grass because of a rattler."

Dawn's spirits began to rise, perhaps because they were getting back up on the mountain, or because she could breathe freely. Her heart was light and she whistled gayly, "Oh, Mariana." Soon they were singing—plaintive Mexican folk airs learned from the despised sheep herders. Garen's baritone joined the chorus.

Hermosa de mi vida,
Mi linda y mi querer;
Mi sola distraccion,
Mi unica pla-acerrr!

Beautiful of my life,
My sweet and my treasure;
My sole distraction,
My only pleasure!

"I like love-songs," Dawn announced in a matter-of-fact way when they had ridden in silence for a

while. Garen's expression quickened hopefully; he reined his shabby pony closer. But at this moment Hinray stepped out from the trees before them. Hinray had been keeping guard, and there was no sign now of any more smoldering. Just the same, young Benty and a couple of the men boarders were going to stay on watch all that night. The other fighters had already left for home.

Garen promptly offered to spend the night on the mountain with the boys, but Damon and Hinray thought that was not necessary. With a word to the three fellows who came down through the pines to hail them, Damon led the way up the trail. They were still quite a way from home. A mile up to Box Canyon Pass, a half mile through to the canyon, a mile over the mountain, three miles down the Amarillo, and another mile up to the cabin on the Cascada. The long ride was made for the most part in silence. Garen rode beside Dawn in a thrall of happiness: he was in love. He had been surprised at the persistence of this attraction, had been tormented to return to the mountains, giving himself a half dozen vague reasons why he should go. Now he knew why he had come.

But he had made up his mind that he would never

tell Dawn until he felt sure that she cared a little bit to have him around, that she enjoyed his company. He would keep it a secret until she was older. So much was Garen enjoying the tender discovery that he rode in selfish contentment beside her.

Dawn too was content to ride silently. She was not given to analysis, but the difference between Garen and Jack was plain. As they neared the forks of the Amarillo and the Cascada she asked her father, "Why didn't some of the folks at Perry's cabin go?"

Damon was half asleep in the saddle. "Eh?" he queried. "We telephoned Benty's to send over word if they could lend a hand with the fire, but none of them turned up." He called out to Garen, who was riding on ahead, "Better come up and stop the night with us, Shepherd. It's late—and quite a piece yet down to Benty's."

Garen hesitated. Would it be putting them out? He would like to accept, but Dawn was already riding ahead. "I'd better go on down," he said; "it's easy going, all down hill from here on." He turned his horse's head toward the ford, which sparkled and leaped in the brilliant moonlight.

If she'd wanted him to stay she would have stopped and seconded the invitation. As a matter

of fact Dawn had not heard her father. She had ridden on, eager to get home, tired out, disappointed in Jack.

Hinray had gone on ahead, making good time on his little mountain "mosquito." When they dragged themselves into the cabin, after unsaddling Piñon and Little Sorrel, he was already snoring lustily on the swing seat before the fire.

"Even snoring couldn't keep me awake tonight," laughed Dawn. "Good night, Damon, dearest. You're the only man I love!"

"Faith, I thought so!" He brushed her hair back affectionately. Now why did she say that? But Damon was too exhausted to think long about anything. All was soon silent in the aspen log cabin, humble and crude, but shining with a silvery brightness under the moon.

Over on the northeast slope young Benty too slept the sleep of exhaustion. The two tenderfoot lads made the rounds of the fire area, and as they saw no flames, sat down on the soft mattress of pine needles beneath the trees. Relaxed with a sense of security, they too dozed. It was almost dawn. They did not see the slowly creeping ground fire that emerged from the beaten-out area. Fanned by the

warm south wind it glowed now, sending out tentative little tongues of flame. Curling about the dry twigs, the new blaze spread slowly through the still hours. There was little for it to feed on yet.

It was late when the cabin on the Cascada roused itself with a yawn. The sun stood at nine, an unheard-of-hour for a ranger to lie abed. Damon was already coming up from a dip in the Cascada when Dawn appeared on the stoop, stretching. Hinray had made his toilet, modest and befitting his circumstances—one dip of the head in a bucket, a vigorous drying with a towel never thereafter to be used.

"Another hot day, Dad," Dawn called, holding up a wet finger to the warm south breeze. "I'll go up to Lake Peak lookout after breakfast just for luck, shall I?"

"Yes," he smiled. "The thermometer must be at all of sixty-five. But the air does seem a bit heavy yet." His nostrils dilated with the memory of smoke on the air, the effort to detect it still.

They were at breakfast when Garen came trotting up to the stoop and swung off with a "Cheerio. How're all the fire-eaters this morning?"

"Does the air seem heavy to you?" Damon asked.

"Not a bit," Garen replied. "I just came down from the Lake Peak lookout. James evidently took the signal down first thing and it was apparently all fair and serene over there. I think it's amazing the air's so fresh and moist," he added, "considering the drouth below and the number of fires in this vicinity."

"Never will have no dry air s'long's there's trees standin'," said Hinray between mouthfuls of bacon and eggs. "Did you ever figger that every good-size tree exhales a barrel of moisture every twenty-four hours? But it's sure dry down below, I'll admit.

"Drouth and death," Hinray paused significantly, "and depression; I notice as they come in fifteen-year cycles, just as the almanac says. They've had drouth, they've had death a-plenty; and now—" he paused dramatically—"watch out for the depression."

"Oh, Hinray, don't be so gloomy at breakfast," Dawn protested. "I feel uncomfortable anyway."

"Oh, we'll git rain a-plenty," Hinray reassured her quickly. "The cycle's bound to be up. That's what I was aimin' to say. And we'll need it, with these fires and short-handed as the service is. Do you know, Mr. Shepherd"—he wagged his pipe at Garen

—"that with a million acres to a forest unit in this country we've got only one range to one hundred and twenty-five thousand acres?" Hinray's plaint was cut short by the jangling of the telephone. It was Jack Perry.

Dawn smiled as she put the receiver to her ear, but she answered in noncommittal monosyllables. Jack was tied up with his father's guests. If he could get away, or get them to ride, he'd ride up that afternoon sometime and see her. All right. She hung up the receiver.

Damon had gone outside and now called out to ask if the folks didn't smell smoke. Dawn thought she did. She telephoned Benty's to talk with the boy. He hadn't got back yet. Chances were he'd gone to sleep right on the ground. It was now nearly eleven o'clock, and Damon had some work to do at his desk. Hinray set off for the Lake Peak lookout again and Dawn washed the dishes while Garen dried them. Garen mentioned that he'd seen young Jack Perry again the day before. He'd been fishing along the Cascada with some company from the East as Garen rode by with Benty's son on his way to the fire.

"I wonder he didn't volunteer," Damon com-

mented over his shoulder. He made no other disparaging remark. He liked Jack.

"May I stay to dinner if I peel the potatoes?" inquired Garen boldly. "I'm a swell K. P."

"You can stay to dinner," Dawn agreed solemnly, "and if you'll wash dishes you can board all year round."

Damon was still nervous. As they ate lunch he was on the alert.

"If I don't hear from Hinray he's to go on to the southwest timber stands," he said. "D'Orsay is an expert timber cruiser," he explained to Garen, "and he'll be gone the next two or three weeks, marking the mature trees. They've been sold on the stump to Gershwin, and Hinray will show the lumber company where they can construct their roads to get the lumber out and not damage the young trees."

The dishes were soon finished and Dawn and Garen sat in the swing seat, resting. Dawn treated Garen with a respect she never accorded Jack, yet somehow she kept listening for Jack's whistle. Was he going to spend the whole afternoon with those tenderfeet? Couldn't they breathe mountain air alone?

"Show me your books of flowers, Dawn," Garen suggested. She brightened and sprang to get them. Damon had returned to his work at the high desk. The afternoon had grown warmer, but the little weathervane outside the window swung its arms about, showing that the wind was veering slowly but surely from the south to the northeast. Dawn jumped up to open the windows facing north. A fresh breeze whisked Damon's papers from his desk and almost simultaneously the telephone began to ring violently.

Damon sprang to answer it while Garen picked up the papers. They heard him exclaim, saw astonishment and distress on his face. "Get every one possible together," he shouted into the phone. "I'll call in the Southern Reserves and we'll go straight over." The forester was all action. "Dawn," he instructed tersely while he gathered pick, gunnysacking, and other things together, "call Benty's again. Fire's broken out on the northeast slope once more."

Young Benty had just got back. The kids had slept on the job; let the fire gain headway from nothing! When he waked they'd fought it awhile but saw it was useless; they were helpless. The south wind had blown it into fresh fields and kept the

smoke away. Damon talked in terse sentences. Hinray had seen James's signal from the other side of the mountain, but when he went to telephone there was something wrong with the line. He had started to ride back down the trail to the cabin, but on the way had seen what the trouble was with the wire, mended it, and returned to Lake Peak lookout, as that was the quickest thing to do.

The change in the wind had turned the blaze in their direction. Flames were near the divide and a crown fire was raging.

"The wind's rising," Damon said. "We must get every station we can reach. Dawn, ride up to Lake Peak lookout and relieve Hinray. He'll go on down to the fire zone as soon as he's done phoning. Some one should have been up there all morning. Shepherd, can you fight with us? Dawn, phone me at McGuire's what direction it's headed. We'll be there by the time you reach the peak or shortly after. We'll start from beyond there and fight back."

Dawn was already at the phone, ringing the stations. Over the wires the call went out and was passed along by word of mouth, and from every mountain ranch and isolated homestead volunteers set forth with shovel, pick, or gunnysacking, to

gather before the fire. Dawn rang the base camp of the fire-fighters that had been organized to protect the southern slopes of the range which Damon had left only the morning before. She caught them just as they were setting out to disband. Some of the emergency helpers had already gone, but the young ranger in charge was there.

Damon took the receiver in his hand. The ranger said he would be on the ground in three hours at most. "Three hours," Damon repeated as he hung up. "Three hours. And it's now after three o'clock. A crown fire, a northeast wind!—Good-by, honey." He strode back to kiss Dawn, who had made a rapid change into her riding-clothes and was halfway to the door.

Garen held her stirrup. "Take care, Dawn. Take care," he said in a low voice.

She hardly heard him. "Good-by. Come on, Shep."

Piñon had never been so cruelly pressed by the adored being to whom he always responded with all his spirit. The speed of the wolf, the sureness of the great-horned sheep, were called upon now, as Dawn turned from the trail, urging him by difficult short

cuts to the summit. The dog asked no lifts but crept with hanging tongue at a steady pace as they mounted higher and higher. Near the summit of Lake Peak he fell behind, but overtook them as they stopped for a moment of enforced rest. At last Dawn saw above her the lookout, built on the summit of a spur of Lake Peak. As her head cleared the tree tops the distant forests came to view.

She gasped with horror. From the northeast a great blaze rolled. With field glass leveled she could see it as though it were just opposite. The acrid smoke was actually in her nostrils and she fancied she could feel the scorch of its breath on her cheek. She left Piñon at the foot of the steps and leaped up to the telephone. McGuire's ring was two short and one very long. There was no answer for some time. Then McGuire took down the receiver.

Yes, this was McGuire; he kept repeating it over and over. Oh, fire, she said. Fire? He couldn't see nothing, but he sort of thought he'd smelt smoke all afternoon, but the sky was so hazy anyways. Dawn was wild with the delay.

"My father, isn't he there? Didn't he telephone you?" McGuire and all his family had been down in the canyon, fishing and berrying, nearly all day.

He couldn't tell. Just came in. Hadn't been near the phone. Wait! Here was the ranger now!

"Damon," Dawn's tense words came clear and crisp, "it's a crown fire all right, traveling with the wind. Not very wide; about a quarter of a mile maybe. It's *crossed* the divide. It might be stopped by a cross fire between the upper Amarillo and the lake."

"All right, daughter. We'll send a man up to the Amarillo ridge." He rang off. Dawn gazed through the windows of the lookout station. Two hours dragged by, incredibly long, nerve-racking. She answered a few hurried, frantic calls on the telephone, and the rest of the time her eyes were glued to the field glass. Where were the men working? At the end of an hour she saw that they had started a cross fire not far above Corona meadow, from which she had driven out the goats at the beginning of the summer. She saw their fire creep from the rocky Amarillo ridge to the granite ramparts of the meadow. She saw the flames rise and die smolderingly away, as the men at the far end met and beat them out. But this was such a short stretch compared to the whole!

The sky to the west was still rosy with sunset, and now the blaze to the northeast was reflected against dark skies. Night was coming on, a fiery night. Before her and on the left rose the Coronado Peaks, jeweled patches like rubies showing where snow banks caught the red firelight. Behind Dawn the slope dropped to Lost Lake where she had bathed only two mornings ago. It seemed weeks away.

She watched the scene in helpless distress. It occurred to her to call Benty's Lodge again. The line was busy. She rang persistently. Some one was probably talking to the little store, telling the news, or just gossiping. After ten minutes Mrs. Benty's voice came shrilly over the wire.

"Everybody's gone over to Snow Lake. Perrys and them just left here to see the fire."

"They'll see it all right pretty soon, wherever they are!" Dawn exclaimed. "Tell folks, Mrs. Benty, to keep out of the way. Who knows what may happen tonight!" When Dawn turned from the phone the whole sky was lit by the galloping fire. Night had fallen now, but the moon had not yet risen. It was a terrific but magnificent sight. So must the forest have been swept from primeval times

by lightning-lit fires, raging unhindered over the Cordilleran summits, watched with awe and superstition by the red man.

Dawn tore her fascinated gaze away long enough to try the lookout station on the southern watershed. There was no answer. Every one had left to meet at Snow Lake. She rang McGuire's again. Shep whined, crouching beside her, his ears pricked forward. There was no answer from McGuire's. Even Mrs. McGuire must be outside, the two babies with her, and that sturdy little nine-year Bonny was probably carrying drinking-water to the men.

There was no change in the wind, no veering of the fiery danger at the north. Dawn could bear it no longer. No use sticking here. She could fight with the men down below. The moon was rising slowly and in a few minutes its radiance would flood the trail. Yet even now the starlight was enough to show the way. She hurried down the rock steps, found Piñon patiently waiting, and with Shep at her heels took the trail down Lake Peak to McGuire's homestead. It was not as far as the distance to her own cabin, but as the trail led through heavy timber the moon could scarcely pierce, it took longer.

The way seemed interminable, and when at last

Piñon burst into McGuire's meadow Dawn could see a mighty glare in the heavens. Now they could run. She pressed heels into the chestnut pony's quivering flanks. Through the upland valley they raced up the ridge. On the other side lay the lake, where in June she had swum Piñon across after her encounter with the goat trespassers. Beyond and above lay the meadows. She had circled by the Amarillo ridge to reach them then and had crossed the lake from the far side. Now, from the top of McGuire's ridge, a terrible panorama spread before her.

With a roar greater than a rushing wind the fire swept through the tree tops, consuming itself utterly in its speed, so that only black ruin and coals smoldering among the seedlings were left in its wake. Ah! Dad had started another blaze above Snow Lake, from the barren escarpment sheering away from the upland meadow, north, in the path of the fire. Could it give battle to that oncoming holocaust? If not, the summit of her beautiful mountain would be ruined. McGuire's homestead that he had worked so hard to improve would be laid bare. His cabin and barn were right in the path of this demon of the elements.

She saw the two fires meet, roll together. Fire

fighting fire. The onward march had been stopped in the north. The fire crew and the tumbling stream that fed Snow Lake halted the spread of flames on their side. She must get down to the dead-line where the men were working to the south. Garen and her father would be there. Beyond the lake the forest narrowed to a vale thick with timber, tall, between two barriers of granite a quarter of a mile apart. Damon had started another blaze at the edge of this boxed vale, and now he and his band fought the vanguard that leaped up among the resinous boles. As she rode she could see them beating at the flames that licked the ground—beating, shoveling dirt, trying to stamp out an area of fifty feet, one hundred, to push the fire over into the path of Snow Lake.

Dawn left Piñon near the lake. "Swim for it, Buddy, if you must"—she spoke to him as though he were a human being—"but come if I whistle. I may need you. All right, Shep, come if you like, but mind you don't get in the way, boy. Find Damon."

Now the forest was filled with a heat such as she had never known. Hal James, who had ridden up through the Box Canyon to try to overtake the blaze and join the workers, said that the fire passed him a

mile away roaring like an express train through the tops of the trees. He never saw anything so beautiful or so terrible. By the time he reached Snow Lake, however, it was all over, for he had been cut off for two hours.

To the spectators from Benty's Lodge and from Perry's place the spectacle was superb too, but to the workers that galloping demon of speed struck terror. It froze the heart and scorched the brain. Now they had beaten out a stretch of several hundred feet. Dawn beat with the rest, working side by side with a slender Mexican lad who sobbed as he toiled, "*Mis bacas, mis bacas.*" His cows were somewhere on the range beyond.

A great tree crashed not far beyond and McGuire staggered from beneath its flaming branches, pulling his sixteen-year-old son out of the way barely in time. Damon O'Neill was at the south end of the fire's path, near Amarillo ridge, trying to close the narrowing gap, to stop the fire there. Unless the fire-fighters could cover the remaining distance to the lake, the fire would leap along an unburned path through McGuire's homestead.

They were working north, trying to stop the gap between the lake and the mother rock that thrust

up around the sheltered meadows above. Dawn was racing through the stretch of yellow pine, down whose slopes she had chased the goats. The fire-fighters were obliged to fall back. Beyond them their world was roofed with flame, leaping from tree to tree. It would burn itself out, down to the waters of Snow Lake, and if God willed, no farther. Had Damon and the brigade of toilers stopped it at both sides?

Stumbling along the pasture fence, whistling for Piñon, Dawn saw two women coming on a staggering run through the trees. They were the wives of herders. She turned back and headed them toward McGuire's cabin. They could take refuge in the fields, could hide somewhere, even if the flames had not been stopped on the right flank of attack. The women stumbled on, their shawls pulled over their faces. Dawn turned once more to find Piñon.

Last among the forest creatures to flee the flames was the golden eagle. Now he rested on a crag above the lake. As the roaring heat came nearer he flapped from one tree to another. Now even the haven of the lake seemed menaced. He rose up, his seven-foot spread looming against the fire-lit heavens, winging his way to the blasted pine that stood stark beyond

the waterfall. No one saw him but the dog Shep, who barked with passion, though now he had no lambs to defend.

Once upon his favorite lookout, the eagle folded his wings majestically. He would flee no farther. He awaited the oncoming holocaust as though defying it to destroy him or the dead tree which he had made his throne.

The fire-fighters were still divided into two squads, one at either end of the attack. The lake must be their bulwark in the center. On the eastern slope, running wildly along in the path of the oncoming flames, Dawn saw people, well-dressed strangers, fleeing in terror of their lives from the great fire which they had come out to see, to be entertained by. On the far side of the fence, some distance behind them, she saw Jack, and heard his excited shouting; but he could not hear her. The men reached the fence, jumped over, and were almost immediately in the glade that opened into McGuire's valley and safety.

But Jack had stopped, bewildered, dazed. Now he saw the fire dragon rushing down on him. "The lake, the lake!" Dawn shrieked, and above the roar overhead he appeared to hear her. Plunging through

the underbrush, Jack made for the shore of Snow Lake.

"Piñon, Piñon!" Dawn shouted. Her frantic whistle pierced the crackling of the fire. She wondered if the pony had become panic-stricken with the smell of smoke and would refuse to move. No, he was a wild horse! A high, familiar nicker close at hand answered her piercing whistle. Piñon trotted up, tail outstretched, head high, his nostrils distended, afraid but faithful. Dawn flung into the saddle, crouching low while they fled before the heat of the flames. She would leap the fence and be behind the lines with Garen and her father, out of the path of danger in a few minutes. They were probably looking for her now.

Through an opening in the trees she saw that the little lake was illumined with unearthly brilliance. Already the fire's hungry advance guard had in places reached the shore-line. As Piñon sprang down the slope Dawn remembered Jack. Then she saw him, backing out into the water, farther, farther, his hands over his face as he crouched away from the scorching heat. She gasped, called to him then to go out no deeper. But as she raced down to the lake he slipped out of sight.

Probably Jack never heard her call as he struggled to the surface and struck wildly out. His limbs were numbed to all but uselessness by the cold water which seemed to drag him down, pull him under to its black depths. With one leap Piñon, responding to Dawn's pressure, cleared the little beach and entered the water. In three steps the horse was beyond his depth, swimming. By the time he reached Jack's side the boy was unconscious, sinking slowly, only his white face and useless hands above the water. Dawn seized the bulging sweater and pulled it towards her just as the water closed over Jack's face.

It was the feat of an Amazon to lift the dead weight up from the heavy depths, with Piñon milling around beneath her, and her vigor was too spent with fire-fighting. She was almost pulled from the saddle. Get both her arms about him, under his arms, lift him up—that was it. "Keep on, go on, Piñon."

With the unconscious and demoniacal struggle for life of the drowning, Jack's arms clutched her shoulders with a grasp, sudden, unexpected, dragging her off the horse, down into the water. Her foot in the stirrup saved Dawn. As she came up she doubled her right fist and caught Jack on the jaw,

putting all her strength in the blow. He ceased struggling. The cold water revived and stimulated Dawn, and she was able to pull herself and the boy over Piñon's back. But the weight was overmuch for him, and he sank so that Jack's head went under.

She pushed the unconscious boy face downward on Piñon's outstretched neck, and with one hand twisted in the chestnut pony's mane, neck and neck she swam by his side to the far shore. Behind them the lake was rimmed with flame, the pine glade a field of giant flambeaux. Before them firelight lit the shore where watchers were waiting with outstretched hands to pull them from the water.

Beyond the lake the bare granite cliffs had stopped the fire's flight, and at the base of the cliff tired men wiped sweat and tears and grime from their eyes and gratefully threw themselves down on the hot smoking earth.

CHAPTER VIII

TRAPS

Tragedy brooded over the mountain. The air was depressed, heavy with smoke lingering from the fire the night before. Still heavier was the atmosphere of the cabin on the Cascada. For a half hour Damon had been talking with two visitors on the porch. One was James Barnes, the Forest Supervisor, whom

Dawn knew, and the other a man whom she had never before seen.

They had been sitting at lunch when the callers arrived. Hinray had slipped out the back door without being noticed. Garen and Dawn had cleared the table and sat down a trifle uneasily. Damon talked on with the Supervisor outside and finally came in, his face unusually grave and worn. The Supervisor and his companion followed.

"No, don't go, Shepherd." Damon nodded as Garen lifted an eyebrow of inquiry as to whether they wished to be alone.

The uncomfortable sense of something pending that Dawn had had all morning now came to a sharp reality. What had happened?

"Daughter, this concerns you," Damon said with obvious effort. Dawn lifted her chin, waiting. The Supervisor took a seat at the table opposite her. Garen stood behind Dawn, and her father sat beside her. The other gentleman, who was introduced as the Assistant Supervisor of the Predatory Animal Bureau for the state, sat down too. His expression was dour.

"Supposing I talk with the young lady," said the Supervisor. He had known Dawn for a long while,

having come to the state but a few years after Ranger O'Neill.

The matter was this. Here was a letter from the Department of Agriculture, the Bureau of Predatory Animal Extinction, setting forth a complaint against her, Dawn O'Neill, on the testimony of one of the Bureau officials; that she had willfully and maliciously interfered with his work: namely, that whenever she found baited traps she had sprung them; that she had released certain small animals and had hidden or demolished poison bait spread in far parts of the range, difficult of access. As these baits were not put out till late in the season, after all cattle had been brought down from the range, the Government's agent had been unaware of the interference with his work until he visited these places, weeks, sometimes months, later.

Damon O'Neill was looking with painful concentration at his daughter. Could she have done this?

The Supervisor finished speaking. He regarded Dawn seriously. There was absolute silence as she struggled with a stony rage in her heart. The Supervisor coughed. "It is really a serious matter," he observed, "and one that we would not expect to en-

counter right in the service. I am told it has been going on for some time, more than a year to certain knowledge and probably still longer." He read three instances of meddling with traps and poison bait.

Dawn sprang to her feet, but before she could say anything Garen caught her arm firmly and pushed her back into her chair. "I guess I'm the man who did it, Mr. Supervisor," he asserted boldly. "At least I did on certain occasions, cited here. If this gentleman here was an eyewitness he must have seen me covering up a poison bait this spring. I was afraid that the game birds—some members of the bureau seem to forget that this is a bird refuge, too —might get it. I have found dead quail and turkey that have fed around the bait. A single grain of arsenic is sufficient for them.

"I am willing to make an issue of this," Garen concluded firmly, "to protest against this method of killing wild animals. Not only because of its cruelty, but because of other, profounder, aspects of their slaughter. The true meaning of this I've learned by contact with this splendid forester, Damon O'Neill, and his daughter, Miss Dawn, who

has done more for the Service than it can ever repay."

Garen's declaration had given no one an opportunity to speak. Dawn was staring at him in amazement. She stood up again and came over behind her father, putting her hands on his shoulders.

"I did it myself," she said firmly. "Mr. Shepherd can't lie for me, though I'm much obliged to him. He did help me cover one poison bait. But I sprung the traps, and many more of 'em; all I could find and spring. And I *always* have hid every bit of poisoned bait I found. I—I've been sorry at times—when I saw some one lose cattle that couldn't afford it. But just the same—" she turned defiantly to the solemn-faced Supervisor of the Predatory Bureau—"it's not right, killing wild things like that.

"Even though my father says it's necessary under the circumstances, it's *not* right. Shoot them if you will. Oh, I know that I can't do any good. My little help isn't going to straighten out all the wrongs of my world any more than what you're doing is going to help any one in the end. It's gone beyond that. But just the same I'm not going to sit still and act as if I liked it! Why, there's too many cattle for the range now." She spread her hands helplessly,

tears in her blazing eyes. "Why kill off the wild creatures? They don't eat grass! They keep your forests and watersheds healthy."

The expert on poison chemistry looked pained and bewildered. What was this abandoned, headstrong young person talking about? But the Supervisor had listened with involuntary appreciation. "O'Neill, your daughter is filled with true scientific ardor, I can see."

"Well, I am to blame for that," Damon replied quietly. "She has been brought up on the soundest principles of forestry. The French hold the wolf a great friend to the forest. They have not the problems of a stock country over there."

"I see, I see." The Supervisor was drumming on the table with his fingers. "Miss Dawn, you love this mountain, don't you?"

Dawn did not reply. She could not. She flushed painfully. The Supervisor continued.

"You want to stay here, of course. And so you must yield to orders. O'Neill—" He turned to Damon, who, having revolved the matter in his mind, was about to say something. "No, just a moment, please. Let us say nothing more about this. I think that when I have explained to the depart-

mental heads the peculiar feeling that Dawn has for the forest and its wellbeing, for the mountain and all the life on it, that the complaints which have been forwarded to the local office will be withdrawn.

"It is scarcely necessary to remind them of your long and exceptional service, but knowing nothing about the facts, I could make no explanation. You and Dawn had better come down to the District Superintendent's office and talk it over."

The forest ranger nodded. "Dawn has worked as hard on this job for the last three years as many a man," he said gruffly. "She's preserved more range to fatten more cattle than the beasts you kill could destroy, I venture."

"That's pure imagination." Pickering of the Predatory Bureau spoke for the first time. "If you have no conception of the value of the work, at least you can keep from interfering. We had set traps for a most dangerous lobo, but finally had to put our hunters on his trail. We got him too—" he glared triumphantly—"the outlaw lobo that we've been after for years—and the last grizzly on this mountain. Shot yesterday."

A cry escaped Dawn, and Damon's big knotty

hands shook so that he had to steady them by holding on to the back of a chair. He recovered himself in a moment.

"You may say," he said directly to his chief, "that my daughter will not interfere with any of the work of the bureau in the future." He came to his feet, his voice rising. "Let them kill off everything and be damned to them. You know as well as I do, Chief, that one wrong don't right another. That's what this country's suffering from now. Too damn many cattle. And I guess the wild beasts know it. But no one takes the hint. Some day the real predatory animal that walks on two legs, 'll get his."

"By golly, O'Neill, you're right. Ours is a slow uphill job; but remember, reclamation isn't accomplished in a year." He shook hands all around, and departed, Pickering protesting as they rode off that the forest ranger was an impractical fool, a visionary.

Damon was shaking with passion. Dawn stood by the table, the color drained from her face. To these two, children of nature, hating the strife and friction of the outside world, the morning's visit had been a decided shock. Garen Shepherd broke the

silence by coming forward with outstretched hands to Dawn.

"Let me shake hands with you, Dawn, and with you, sir. I'm proud to know you both. You are ornaments to a grand work and should be presented with special medals. And you will be, before the task is finished. Mark my words."

"That old lemon-face!" came Hinray's voice from the kitchen door.

Dawn laughed suddenly, a bright spontaneous laugh, clearing away the gloom that had fallen on the cabin as a fresh wind sweeping through clears out smoke. She had laughed this way when Garen first heard her across the lake.

"That's that!" she shouted. "Oh, Damon, cheer up! I'll not be shot or put in the reformatory. Thank you, Garen Shepherd," she whirled on the Irrigation engineer, "thank you for that one grand lie. But do you suppose I'd let anybody else take the credit for a sin I'm proud of?" And while she wrung his hand she laughed again, happy once more, full of exuberant gayety.

CHAPTER IX

DAM IN THE DESERT

Just above the forks of the Cascada lay a deep pool where rainbow trout hovered, darting from the shade to flash tantalizingly across the sunlit shallows. Sometimes they leaped through the rapids where the tumbling Cascada foamed into the Amarillo. Then anglers bit their nails and swore.

For no one could say, "I caught this fellow up in the Cascada, just by the forks."

Mr. Perry had thought that was nonsense. Every day for three weeks he whipped the stream ardently, but still had nothing to show for it. He made a strike that dragged him into the rushing fork flat on his

face. With his bones aching from the unaccustomed chill he tramped all the way down to his camp, where with chattering teeth he recounted the tussle. Proudly he displayed the hookless line, snapped just above the leader.

"Who says they won't bite up there? Some fish, boys! Did he pull? And how!"

But the next day Hal Benty found the hook, the fly, and the leader, caught in the willow brush on the far side of the rapids.

"He ought to *know* Dawn don't allow nobody to actually fish anythin' out o' here." Young Benty passed sentence and appropriated the fly. This was one of the streams that the forest ranger had stocked with fish from the Government hatcheries that spring.

Hal closed his fly-book hastily. Here was Jack Perry, Junior, coming across the ford right now. Jack pulled up his pony beside Hal just as Hal made ready to whip the branch upstream to the Amarillo.

"Howdy? How're yuh?" he answered the other boy's greeting. "Not much luck yet. Only been out an hour. Just thought I'd take a little time off, after fighting fire the last month and herding dudes all

summer. How're yuh feelin' now?" Jack Perry was a real likable kid. Hal himself was only seventeen, with the mind of a boy of eleven, but he looked twenty-five. People born and reared in that altitude were apt to look older than they really were.

"Oh, I'm all right now," Jack replied. "I was kind of knocked out for a couple of days after the ducking I got. Swallowed a lot and had a sort of chill."

"It was sure lucky Dawn happened to see you," young Benty reminded him.

Jack flushed. "I'll say! I'm going up there now to thank her again. Haven't been able to ride up since that night. The doctor made me stay in bed two days."

"You're too late. She's not there," Hal called over his shoulder, grinning. "Her and her father went to town this morning. Wonder you didn't see 'em pass. My brother drove 'em down in the car to the train." Hal went on up the stream.

Jack stood still in the water, his horse content to cool his feet. She'd gone to town. What must they think of him? Not one of the Perry family had been up there since the night of the fire. His father had been over at the store the following morning and

telephoned the O'Neill cabin, but neither Dawn nor Damon O'Neill had been at home. Well, his dad had sent a box of chocolates up by a little Mexican boy. *That* was something.

No one ever learned of the mishap with which the small Mexican had met, losing his box of chocolates in the Cascada. The sodden package recovered with unusual agility and concern, the lad had retired into the bushes, to emerge a half hour later with an expression of wan satisfaction.

Jack turned his horse's head about. Might as well go back home. His uncomfortable feeling persisted. He'd ride up first thing they got back. He certainly did want to see Dawn. Come to think of it, she really had saved his life. Gee! He'd never forget the sensation when he found there was no bottom under his feet. He had backed right out into the lake, it shelved off so suddenly. And the cold—that choking blanket of water! He didn't remember much of anything more till he got home.

Jack shook off the dark memory. Here, now, the sunshine was warm and friendly. He rode on down the canyon road, stopping in at the general store, also the post office, where fish stories were swapped and great trout catches pictured and described on

the walls. He enjoyed the notoriety of having had so close a call the night of the fire. He had hoped to see that Government chap, Garen Shepherd, again. A nice fellow, college chap too. Funny he was content with this hard-labor, out-of-door thing.

But at the store Jack heard talk only of the fire and similar fires. Old man Benty was full of fact and fictions, which he dispensed as he weighed sugar and passed out cigarettes. What had started it? The electrical storm a week ago. It had lit twenty-three fires in different spots on the mountain range.

Nobody could blame Hal for goin' to sleep over on the northeast slope, for he'd fought fires for forty-eight hours with practically no sleep at all; and he'd been working as patrol man and "smoke-chaser" for the forest service all summer. There was a fire still burning over beyond the Coronado Peaks that nobody couldn't get at. Burned for weeks. Surface fire, just above timber line.

"O'Neill said this morning how they've already put out six hundred fires in the state this year. But that's higher than usual, owin' to drouth. Remember the great Minnesota fire?" Old Man Benty had nearly as many facts and figures as Hinray. "It lasted eleven hours and cost fifteen million dollars.

It burned four thousand homes, five thousand barns, and cost five hundred lives. Yes, sir! That's what a fire *kin* do if let loose. This one could 'a' swep' right on to Albukirk, I reckon. And those boys that was standin' watch for Hal thought the sparks in the moss didn't matter!"

Jack found that Garen Shepherd had gone back too. He had driven down to the station with Dawn and her father. Jack felt a pang akin to jealousy. He had been mildly infatuated with Dawn all summer and had played about with her because he had to have a companion. But now he felt all at once that this was different. As he rode back to the cabin camp he was moved to more gratitude than he had ever felt.

Faintly it dawned on him that he might be somehow remiss. Dawn might think him a slacker not to have joined the men and boys who fought the fire. He and his father's friends had gone to look at the great spectacle as though it had been one of the entertainments provided by the Forest Service and were to be enjoyed as part of the summer's vacation. He had a vague feeling that perhaps it would have served him right to drown. Yes, that was so, he concluded wretchedly, as he came in sight of home.

He owed Dawn his life. He had said that before. They had all said it, jovially; but now he realized it. All that was decent in the boy was strongest at that moment. He could hardly wait for her to come back. As he trotted up the slope to the lodge he reflected that meanwhile he'd have to be nice to Norine Masters. Her father was one of his dad's partners. He succeeded so well in being agreeable to Norine that by afternoon he had already been teased into secret shame for the emotion he had felt for the mountain girl that morning.

Dawn had not wanted to leave the mountain. Her father had been called down to relieve the district forester's office, and it was decided that she might as well go with him now. Garen decided that he would cut his vacation short and take a few days at another time. He would ride down with them. They reached the city that evening, and Garen went on to the dam the next morning.

On the third day Dawn sat with her father in the district forester's office. The Supervisor talked with his eyes gazing through the windows off to the mountains. "In the face of your record, O'Neill, and of Miss Dawn's unsalaried services, the very men-

tion of these protests seems unfair. But, you understand, I was obliged to look into them. Although I may say I very much disliked having to pay you a visit accompanied by any member of the—ah—other branch of the service, I thought it would be better than to discuss the matter coldly by letter.

"However, I am happy to state that the subject is closed." He brought his gaze back to Dawn, smiling, and laid a letter in her lap. She read it with a radiant smile and handed it over to Damon. With grave dignity the ranger read the statement of the Supervisor. Then he thrust out his hand. "Thank you, sir," he said huskily. Damon had not realized how distressed he had been by this charge against Dawn. It had filled the whole horizon and at night crowded his fancies with all sorts of horrid possibilities.

Now they would always be together on their mountain, as they always had been. The Supervisor wanted Ranger O'Neill to stay in the office for a week, which would free him to get into the field. He wanted to ride over the northern forests with his assistant. Damon was glad to serve and pleased with the confidence and honor shown in entrusting some special work to his care.

Dawn stayed too, of course, putting in a more or less lonely week. The evenings were delightful, however. She and Damon, hanging on each other's arms like sweethearts, saw the sights and ate ice-cream and more ice-cream. But by day it was dull. Dawn was not resourceful in the unaccustomed life of even the quaint old Spanish town. She was too timid to call on any of the people who had visited them in the mountains, eaten at their table, taken refuge before their fire.

She missed Garen and wished that he had not gone. She thought of Jack and looked forward to getting back up on the mountain, when she would see him again. They'd had good times riding over the mountains together. It had never occurred to Dawn that any demonstration should be made because of her dragging Jack out of the lake. She herself felt no injury at not having seen any of the Perry family after the fire, as she knew that Jack was sick abed.

Now she wandered about the streets, unable to sit still, and listened to people talking. "Damon," she said, "everywhere down here I see cattlemen standing talking. And in the hotel lobby all I hear is hard times. I thought we were getting through

the summer fine, even if it is hotter than usual."

"On the mountain, yes," he replied; "but we've been so busy with fires and the work up there that we forget sometimes what's going on down here. Things look rather bad, I guess. I'm mighty glad we aren't dependent on the range for a livin'. And I'm glad too that we've money in the bank."

"Money in the bank," Dawn echoed. "I'll need a lot when I go to school this winter, won't I, Dad?"

Money had little actual meaning for them in the present, but its existence in the safest bank in the state gave Damon a great and abiding sense of protection. Protection for Dawn; there was the money, a bird in the hand, for after all, a mine—a mine—well—he would grin to himself a trifle sheepishly.

It seemed ages before the week came to an end. They were to go back to the mountains Sunday morning. But on Friday Damon was called down to the state office in the big city of the railroad, to go over some reports. They sat in the train, choking with the dry powdery dust that blew in from the desert-dry mesas, themselves parched with the unaccustomed heat and dryness. Damon bought the morning paper.

On the front page he read that the Southern State Cattleman's Bank had closed its doors and was refusing payment. That was disquieting. Still, it was a small bank, entirely state capital, owned largely by big stockmen in a cattle county. The big state and Federal loan banks would probably not feel the depression. He saw among the "personals" that Mr. John Perry and family had come down from the mountains to be in town for a while. Mr. Perry had been called back on business. On another page there was a statement by Mr. Perry that there was no likelihood of any financial depression in the northern part of the state.

Down in the city, however, Damon heard talk, hints, forebodings of hard times to be weathered that fall. There had not been a drop of rain all summer. People spoke hopefully of the new dam.

The heat of the day was incredible. It was impossible to stay out on the streets. Damon decided that it would be nice for Dawn to go up to the Perry's home for the afternoon. The courts and deep verandas of the hotel were fairly cool, but there was no face she knew. The downtown streets were like a furnace. Dawn shrank from the treeless glare, but she walked with her father up the street to the offices

where he would have to spend the afternoon. Damon gave her the address of the Perry house and showed her where to wait for a trolley.

But she walked, her sun-brown arms swinging bare in the sleeveless dress bought the day after she came down from the Cascada. The wide streets were now canopied by great cottonwoods, that noble tree of the lowlands, which Dawn regarded with pleasure and reverence. How well they did themselves in this dry air! Their shade was an oasis in the desert. Her feet seemed small and light in their new sandals. Jack would be glad to see her.

In this alien world at the mountain's foot she turned to Jack as to an old friend. She was lonely, awkward, ill at ease. But with a friend she would once more feel herself. It seemed strange to walk on a level. All the houses seemed to be leaning over her. Her legs all but ached from having no hill to climb. Where was the house anyway? She came on the place at last, a gaudy stucco meant to be pure Spanish, with a red-tiled roof. It looked very grand to Dawn. She went up the steps timidly. No one was on the wide, screened veranda, dazzling with yellow wicker and chintz. The screen door was locked; so she couldn't reach the bell to the house door. She

rattled the screen, knocked, and after a while a Mexican maid came.

"What you want?" inquired the girl indolently.

"Mr. Jack Perry. Is he at home?" Dawn pressed her face to the shiny copper screen, through which she could scarcely see.

No, he was out. The maid turned as if to close the front door behind her. "But Mrs. Perry?" Dawn spoke quickly. "Or Mr. Perry?" Weren't they at home, and when was Jack coming back?

"Mrs. Perry she is on the bed, rest. Can not be disturbed by *nada*, *nadie*. Mr. Perry he make siesta too," droned the Mexican girl.

Dawn stood forlornly on the steps in the hot sun. She could not see through the close wire screening whether the girl had closed the front door or not. The cool, darkened porch, the welcome she had expected, seemed denied her. She waited, chin up, feeling rebuffed. There came quick steps, the screen door was pulled open, and a man hurried out. It was Mr. Perry himself. He started down the steps to the car waiting at the curb but turned as he saw the girl and hesitated.

Dawn spoke.

"Oh, yes, yes. Miss O'Neill, the ranger's daugh-

ter. Of course, of course." He was hurried, seeming to remember her with an effort. "Ah, yes. Down in the city, eh? Just walk in, won't you? Make yourself at home." As though vaguely aware that there was something that he might do in the way of hospitality, he waved his hand toward the porch. "Go right in, go right in!" Muttering something about having to get back to the bank, he hurried on out to his car.

Dawn stepped inside, seating herself on one of the wide, flowered chairs. It was refuge for the moment from the heat and from depression. The Mexican girl stood in the doorway. When Mrs. Perry woke, Dawn told her, please say that the girl she had met in the mountains was downstairs. Mr. Perry had told her to come in and wait.

She sat silently for a long time. The afternoon waxed and waned with breathless heat. How good a drink from a bubbling spring would taste! Her eyes closed. Dawn could see the drinking-hole on the Cascada just below their cabin. The Mexican girl came out again after a while. "Mrs. Perry waked up but say she can not come down. She have bad headache. Too bad." The girl shrugged with resignation.

"I think I'll be going." Dawn rose with dignity, picking up the twisted handkerchief that served as purse. A car was coming down the street and she paused irresolutely. It slowed, stopped suddenly before the door with a grinding of brakes, and Jack himself jumped out, turning to help a slender girl, a slip of a girl in a wide floppy hat under which peeped corn-colored curls. Her little blue dress, sleeveless too, was no bigger than a child's. Two boys followed, and they came up the walk, all chattering at once.

Dawn wavered in panic. Her instant thought was flight. But they were at the steps. She plunged through the front door into the house, down the hall ahead, through a dark doorway. Before her the kitchen opened, a door into the back yard. She hurried by the Mexican maid, sitting wide-eyed at her pan of peas, and out. Voices behind her, Jack's voice. Well, let him follow. But she wouldn't stay.

It was all right, of course, but she just wanted to get away. She'd been there long enough anyway. She turned and ran, down a tiny lane, behind an old adobe wall, into a quaint crooked street of old Mexican houses, where hollyhocks and zinnias throve in

the sun like lizards. Here all was peaceful and familiar.

It was six o'clock before she found her way back to the hotel. Damon was already waiting on the veranda. She had walked off her hurt and was able to say yes when Damon asked if she had had a good time. They went into dinner at once, an experience which they always found delightful. As they awaited the inevitable ice-cream a familiar figure walked into the dining-room. It was Garen Shepherd. He looked about, saw them, and came straight over to their table.

Dawn's eyes grew bluer, her color deepened; she felt a sense of happiness and gratitude. Here was a friend. Where had he come from? Garen had seen in the paper that they were still in Santa Fe and was on his way up there himself when he'd noticed their names on the register of this hotel. He sat down with them and they lingered through the meal. Garen seemed to know a good deal more about the financial condition of the state than Damon did.

The paper that evening carried on the front page the news that two more banks in the southern part of the state had failed. It was the opinion, however,

that the northern part of the state would pull out of the admitted depression. A statement was quoted from Mr. John Perry to the effect that the depression would be short-lived and that another year would show a great development and expansion, a chance for investment.

"No investment for me. I'll keep mine in the bank," said Damon.

As the three sat in the cool patio after dinner Garen received a telegram. He read it regretfully and handed it to Dawn. Just when he was having such a nice time! He must get back to the dam in the morning. Then Garen had a brilliant idea. Chief Engineer Stearn, of the dam, and his wife were in town and were leaving that night. Early in the morning they would reach the station from which one motored out to the dam. He would return with them. Wouldn't Dawn like to go and make that trip to the dam? He would show her over the whole thing. They might not get such another opportunity.

Damon looked at Dawn questioningly. Would she like it? She would. She had always wanted to see the dam. Garen seemed so eager to have her go. He would speak to his chief and Mrs. Stearn at once and arrange matters. And so for the first time since

she could remember Dawn slept that night in a sleeping car, whirling over the desert in a sun-heated steel case hot to the touch. She lay for a long time staring into the darkness, listening to the song of the wheels and the roar of the engine. When the cool air of early dawn rushed over the desert she fell asleep; two hours later she woke as refreshed as though she had slept ten hours.

Powerful motor cars met them. Dawn sat in a luxurious seat with Garen and the charming motherly woman who was the chief engineer's wife. They whirled over a desert delicately opalescent in the early light. Suddenly, without warning, the great lake behind the dam lifted into view—a sheet of the sky laid down like a vast mirage.

"It's the nearest to the ocean I've ever been," Dawn said. This was where the water from her mountains came! Her heart ached for the lofty wooded summits so far away. Water, water, in a fantastic desert of carven mesas, painted spires, incredible flats, vast crouching foothills like creation in the making. Now they were whirling down a canyon, a tree-bordered gorge below the great man-built lake that lay behind the dam.

In a house whose cool elegance reflected its silver-

haired mistress, they ate an exquisite breakfast—fruit, iced coffee with real cream, thin, delicate bacon, and rolls that were a confection to the healthy palate accustomed to coarse whole wheat. The distinguished engineer and his wife showed Garen Shepherd flattering attention and paid his word marked deference. They treated him as though he were an important person.

Mrs. Stearn drew out the girl charmingly. "You were born in Washington, my dear? And so was I." Think of it, there they were in a land where the arctic regions and the tropics were both to be found. "We're in the desert, and you in the Alps," said Mrs. Stearn.

Dawn was to make the trip over the dam before ten o'clock, for the sun would be too hot after that. They were at an altitude several thousand feet below that to which she was accustomed, yet Dawn climbed like a mountain goat up the great works that looked like an Egyptian temple. At last she stood on the broad summit, to look at lake and sky of such intense blue that the eyes ached from gazing.

"It's full of fish," said Garen, who stood beside her. "The best black bass fishing in the world. I'll let you fish for my fish almost any time, and that

was more than you would let me do in your river!"

Dawn laughed, and with the laugh vanished the hidden pain that had hung like lead within her ever since Government officials had stepped into the morning sunlight of their cabin door, all the heavy-heartedness that the Perry home had so shaken up yesterday. There was no room for hurt any more. The world was a sparkling place of kindness.

"All this water is from your mountains and from the foothills," Garen was saying. "Look, Dawn, already the dam has saved the spring downpour from these poor denuded dunes. It will supply irrigation water to thousands of farms and grow melons sweet as honey, peaches big as grapefruit, and when the old Rio Grande rises and comes rolling down . . ."

"It will catch all the silt," Dawn interrupted teasingly.

"With rare observation the young lady has put her finger straight on the sore spot of all engineers," said Mr. Stearn, standing beside her. "Far too much of the desert already lies at the bottom of this lake. It will have to be dredged some day, Shepherd. But mind your mountain up above, young lady—" he shook a jovial finger at her—"for if I find any

black or red earth at the bottom I'll know you haven't been tending your business."

"I'll not neglect it for anything," Dawn replied. "I'll go back right now and watch my shrubs and trees grow themselves. I'll leave you valley folks to grow grapes as big as a bushel basket and corn eighteen feet high!"

During the heat of the day Dawn and Mrs. Stearn stayed indoors, sipping iced drinks. Major Stearn, as Dawn learned that the engineer-in-chief was called, and Garen, joined them at sunset. After dark they ate dinner on a veranda under the stars. A cool air breathed over the desert that had scorched at noon. Dawn's train left at midnight. Her father would meet her at the station in the morning.

CHAPTER X

MONEY IN THE BANK

Damon had never mentioned to Dawn the incident of the poisoned bait. He understood his daughter too well. It would have been punishment to her. It had wounded him deeply that she should have been reprimanded. He was only human, and after the matter had passed, his feeling of their being in the wrong was tinged with resentment.

In his world there were the mountain and the Service. In Dawn's world there was only the mountain. The Service was a servant and she a handmaiden to the mountain. If the servant was in the wrong she would disregard him.

"But they're not entirely in the wrong, darlin'," Damon protested. "We have to effect a balance for the unnatural conditions man makes. Keeping down the beasts is cruelty that's for the good of the whole, and *that* patterns after the grand scheme of Nature too."

Dawn flung out her arms impetuously. "All right, all right. We won't argue about it, Damon, we won't

argue," she cried irritably. "But they're wiping out the creatures, and that's just the beginning. When the creatures go, it'll all be desert."

"Well, now," Damon soothed as he puffed at his pipe, "think of what the bird refuges have done this year. Think of the antelope and deer, and cheer up. That's some help, isn't it?"

Apparently it was. "Damon—!" Dawn's eyes flashed with her usual spirit—"do you know I saw the grosbeak and the chestnut-backed bluebird in the willows about the dam, and yesterday there were mocking-birds down in San Mateo. The mountain bluebirds that had almost gone last year were thick, and the blue piñon jays calling 'peenyoney, peenyoney' as they picked off all the nuts. Poor things. They had flown before the fire. And do you know, Dad, I saw the biggest eagle I ever saw the day after we came back from down below." Dawn was sewing up her stockings. Damon's she darned with a beautiful weaving of wools taught her by Hinray. "This bird was a golden eagle, I'm sure, from his shining golden brown color as he soared in the sun. He must have been nine feet from tip to tip."

Damon whistled. "And I brought her up to be

truthful! Go on, go on, my gal. You'll be a writer yet."

"Well," Dawn went on, undeterred, "he soared round and round over one spot. I was above McGuire's and I looked across the valley to where you can catch a glint of the waterfalls if you stand in just the right place—that's where I took Garen—and I saw the eagle.

"Once before I saw that eagle, when I was just a kid. I remember it swooping down over me as I was picking flowers in the meadow while you surveyed below. Suddenly I thought the sun went under a cloud, but something made me look up, and here was the cloud between me and the sun, dropping down to earth. I was frozen still. It swept so close I could see its beak and eyes. Then with a great whirring of wings it stopped and shot straight back up into the air again."

"He might have taken you away," Damon observed thoughtfully. "I'd never thought of that danger, thank goodness. I know that bird too," he nodded, pulling at his pipe. "He's the oldest on the mountains, I imagine. He is a huge creature."

"Well, what I had meant to tell about was this," Dawn went on. "After circling, the eagle dropped

like a stone and disappeared just about where the falls were. I wanted to see where he had landed, because maybe there's an eyrie there, and with all my hunting I've never found an eagle's eyrie this far up, though I know there are some. But it was too late when I got over to the other side; he was perched above me on an old tree, a dead tree."

"That's the fellow," Damon replied. "He likes the old dead tree. They often do. He's too old for mating, but he's feathered many a nest of eaglets in the past, that old bird, and I'll wager could tell tales if he could talk—of the trappers in these woods and the old scouts and Indian fighters.—What about some grub?"

As they ate, Hal Benty rode up with mail and papers. He sat on his horse by the stoop awhile, chatting.

"Perrys're comin' back," he said just as he was leaving. "They're bringin' a bunch with 'em for some fall hunting. Pa says it seems as if those fellows was never too busy nor too much taken up to hunt. They'll be here tomorrow, if they ain't already in this afternoon."

"I'm going to ask Mr. Perry about the rumors in the paper of the banks in the city," said Damon.

"I'm mighty glad we've got our money in a state bank. Things don't seem to be getting any better. That reminds me, honey. What school is it to be for the second year? You know we want to get the application in this fall."

"I know, I know, Damon. Let's decide it this evening or tomorrow." She began to laugh, to tease Shep, and putting a record on her phonograph, essayed a one-step, very stiffly.

"Them dances is turrible!" There was Hinray looking in the door. He was always appearing unexpectedly. "Why'n't you do the Hota or the Tekalotita that you learned down to the Pecos dances? They're somp'n to look at. But you got to have a flower in yore teeth. Wait!" He disappeared, returning a moment later from the river with a sprig of wild roses.

Dawn was in a gale of merriment. The idea of holding the flowers in her teeth was convulsing, but when Hinray put on a Spanish record she seized them and flung into the stamping abandon of the old folk dance preserved by the descendants of the conquistadores who dwelt in the little town at the foot of the mountain.

She was stamping the dust out of the floor when

the music stopped amid more handclapping and *otra vezes* than an audience of only three could achieve. The door was filled with people—Jack, a young woman, an older man.

Jack was smiling in his disarming and confident way as he jumped in and seized Dawn's hand. She yielded with nothing of resentment. She'd been afraid that Jack would never come back to the mountain. He'd been almost her first playmate. For you couldn't think of Hal that way; *he* wasn't understanding enough. Sometimes she had regretted that she had run away that day in the city. Perhaps if she'd stayed she'd have had a nice time. But she couldn't face all those others.

At times she'd felt that Jack meant to ignore her; that it couldn't be accidental, and that if he returned *he* should be ignored. But what reason *could* he have for not being nice! Of course, she was just acting like a baby. Now here he was and they'd have a grand ride. Dawn was radiant with the surprise. The party were out to take a ride and wanted her to guide them.

Jack felt very much at home at the O'Neill cabin. He was troubled with no misgivings. He was glad to be back, and when he was in the mountains he

wanted to see Dawn, and that was all there was to it. Norine Masters had gone back home now, but in town—well, maybe it was just as well that Dawn had got away that day, after all.

"Sorry we missed you when you were in town," he offered casually. "Dad is so busy he hardly knows what he's doing, and Mother was down with the heat. I wasn't sure it was you. You should have waited."

The Kansas City guests were charmed with the aspen-log cabin, with the view, with the trout in the Cascada, with everything. They wanted to ride through the dark forest, up the tanbark trail to Lake Peak, to look down on Lost Lake and up to the snow-capped Coronados. Tomorrow they were to go on the hunt. Turkey. Oh, too early for turkey? What a pity!

Dawn glanced at Damon. Should she go? He nodded; he had desk work at home. Jack was beside her on the ride, which would bring them home after sundown. It was when they had started down the trail that Mr. Harmon, gazing on the little lake that lay like a vanity mirror in an emerald case below them, said, shivering, "That must have been some plunge you had the night of the fire, Jack, in

ice water. Who was it they said rode in with a horse after you?"

"It was this girl here," Jack replied in embarrassment. The mountaineers had told the tale to the Harmons. "Oh, I thought I had explained when you were introduced. It was Dawn. I don't know what I would have done without her. I never did have a chance to see you afterward and thank you, Dawn. I came up—I surely did appreciate—"

"Don't mention it," Dawn interrupted coolly. "A little thing like that!" There was a twinkle in her eye. Mrs. Harmon burst out laughing and exchanged significant glances with her husband. Jack joined rather ruefully in the merriment at his expense, tried to say something, but couldn't.

Mrs. Harmon was an excellent horsewoman, Dawn discovered, warming to her. "I'm coming out here again," Mrs. Harmon told her, "and if you ever come through Kansas City please let me know and come and stay at my house. I'll give you the best horse I can find to ride. It won't be like your Piñon here, though."

How moist it was up under the trees! Yet they'd had no rain for weeks.

"There'll be a terrific rain before the week is out,"

Dawn prophesied. "It is due the mountain, and when it comes, look out. Seems as if the whole state is just waiting for a deluge, for something to burst."

Mr. Harmon looked at her curiously. "I love thunder and lightning," Mrs. Harmon said quickly, shaking her head at her husband.

"You've never heard it before," Dawn assured her, "until you've heard it in the mountains."

Jack rode as near Dawn as the trail would allow. He felt a change in her manner toward him, and as though he knew he was losing something, tried to regain the old footing, the something that he'd rather drop than have taken away from him. But he could not regain it, try as he would. Nor could Dawn.

Her pleasure in having him back faded, and with it faded also the hurt attached to the thought of his home. Yet in the going a loss was left, a vacancy that even the glory of her mountain did not quite satisfy or fill, a loss of faith in humankind. It was one of the first encounters that Damon had feared for her; he knew too well the hurts that friendship can experience.

When Dawn parted from the crowd at the ford near her cabin Jack rode close to Piñon and said cheerfully, "I'll be up first thing in the morning,

Dawn. The bunch are hunting, but I'm not going. I'll break loose and be over. So long."

Damon had put the potatoes on and was reading his mail. He looked worried and hot. "Here's a note from Shepherd. He'll be up the end of the week." He tossed it to Dawn. "The state is in a bad way." He was reading a two-day-old paper with detached interest. "Goodness, the bank at Tucumcari has gone, and three in other sections of the state. That is the tenth in the last ten days. Yet here are statements from Perry, among others, saying that though the situation is hard for the smaller cities, there is no danger for the state banks.

"I guess things must be all right," Damon tossed the paper down, "or Perry wouldn't be up here at this time. That's a big banker from Chicago, or Kansas City, that he's got at his place now. I'm glad we've got money in the bank, my sweet."

Damon left the next morning for a survey of the burned-over area on the northeast slope. One gain only had been accomplished; the dead wood and rubbish, the worst sort of fire trap, had been completely burned off, leaving the upper slope free for a fresh start. The lower slope was denuded. Centuries later it might again accumulate enough soil to

sustain a forest growth. Now, however, there was not a sprig left to keep the soil from washing down into the desert.

James's canyon would be dry except for flood waters. The ranchman had written Damon for information on how to make application for a farming homestead under the new dam project. It was a distressing trip over the mountains. The fire, Damon discovered, had smoldered its way, worm-like, through the humus for days. It was not surprising that the boys had not seen it. It had taken two days to travel a half mile, and in one hour after the wind rose it had swept through eight miles. So swiftly had one part burned, leaping from the crown of one tree to another at forty to fifty feet from the ground, that the growth beneath had merely shriveled, and with rain would spring up again from the roots.

Still, it was a depressing sight, and Damon was glad to get back to the upper Amarillo and the untouched woods again. It was nine o'clock when he lifted a weary leg from the saddle and stepped off on to the cabin porch. Dawn met him, took Little Sorrel's bridle, unsaddled and turned her loose, then hurried to place Damon's dinner before him. Cup after cup of steaming coffee he drank in contented

silence, then pushed back his chair and held out his arms.

Dawn settled down, disposing her long legs over the arm of the chair. She had stayed at the cabin all day, working about the place. Jack had come over, but hadn't been there more than an hour when his folks had sent for him. He said he would phone her back, but she hadn't heard from him, and just about an hour ago one of the Bentys had come by and said that the whole crowd had left. Gone back to town on the evening train. Mr. Perry had been called on business. Dawn handed Damon the morning paper. Jim Benty had brought it up to them.

The banks had *crashed!* The whole state had been stricken by a sweeping financial disaster. The loans extended to the stockmen and renewed through the past four years had been called in at last, the resources of the state were exhausted, and this morning the First State Bank and the Federal Cattlemen's Loan had had to close their doors. Yesterday there had been a run on one of the savings banks, which had paid out to the last penny, and the president had given his guarantee to his depositors that he would in time make good to them every cent, and

that he would in some way safeguard all his investors.

But the Cattlemen's Loan! Perry up here hunting with this damnable thing imminent! Had he wanted to be out of the way when it happened? Or was he trying to get help from the Kansas banker? The paper said that although the Cattlemen's Loan had been the last to go under, its resources had already been exhausted.

Damon read and reread the front page. Then he threw it down, smiling bitterly.

"Money in the bank," he said. "Money in the bank, oh, yes! Your money, Dawn. Yours! My God, that young—"

"Don't say it, Daddy; don't say it!" Her firm fingers were on his lips. "Perhaps it isn't gone. Wait till tomorrow, darling. And—I don't care, Damon. Honest, I don't. We've got our home, we've got Piñon and Little Sorrel, our jobs. And, Dad, look! We've still got a chance at the Silverstake Mine. See." She thrust the paper before him again, pointing to a small boxed item.

Congress had refused the bill to open up the Indian Reservation for public grazing or any public

uses whatsoever. But a statement made by the Indian Office said that the survey made by the Land Office would have to be the accepted boundary. That would mean that the Indians would be cut off from the Sacred Source which they loved so much, and it would also impair their title to the use below of their own water. It left Damon's claim on the public domain.

"Daddy, tomorrow I'll ride over there." Damon nodded. Nothing made much difference anyhow. She might as well look for the old pine tree again, if she wanted to.

CHAPTER XI

THE SILVERSTAKE PINE

The double-headed engine came snorting and puffing up the grade, pulling behind it the early express. Through the red canyons it wound and slowed to a stop for thirty seconds at the highest station on the Santa Fe system. In those thirty seconds Garen Shepherd swung down, suitcase in hand, waved ahead to the engineer, and turned to Hal Benty, whom he had wired to meet him on the five-thirty

and who was waiting with his Ford on the other side of the tracks.

Hal had had to leave home at three-thirty but was just as glad, for it was a hot day and they might as well make the trip early. They would be up on the Amarillo by nine. Already the temperature in the railroad cut was insufferable, and the place looked like an inferno of red earth, studded with stunted, twisted little trees, writhing in the heat.

Garen might have stopped for breakfast at one of the dude ranches in the lower valley, but he pushed on eagerly. He had left the city at four, forcing his way on to the through express. The city was prostrate with bad news and heat. The afternoon before there had been queues of creditors before every bank till long after closing time.

The stockmen were all ruined and had pulled down with them tradesmen, citizens, shopkeepers, and professional men. There wasn't any ready money to be had, Garen told Hal; just the cash people had on 'em. They would have to get along till more actual cash was brought into the state from outside. He had fifty dollars himself till next Government payday.

The president of the People's Bank had nearly lost his mind. He had been fighting this thing for weeks. He'd make good every cent with his personal funds before he finished. But it would clean him out, leave him penniless. The Perry bank? Perry had paid out that afternoon and had left on the midnight train for the East with his family.

"I don't think he has the faintest notion of coming back," said Garen, "though I may be doing him an injustice. He said he was going East for loans. His personal fortune is untouchable. He's a blowhard. Development? Hell!"

Garen spent little time over the breakfast that good, fat Mrs. Benty set before him. He was eager to be on his way up to the aspen-log cabin on the Cascada. The sun was already high and incredibly hot for the mountains when he parted the trees on the trail and splashed across the ford below the ranger's home.

"Halloo, there!" They would be surprised to see him, two days earlier than he had said he would come. Damon appeared in the door, shouting a hearty greeting. Dawn had ridden over to McGuire's valley. He'd told her not to go. They sat down and Damon heard the news. As Garen's story of the bank

crash corroborated his worst fears Damon's teeth closed tighter about the old briar pipe.

"Cleared out, eh? Wish I'd taken a minute with him yesterday! It can't be possible that they won't pay up in full! Until the day before yesterday I had never even been afraid of that bank. Man, do you know that all my savings of years, everything that was for Dawn, is in that bank—was in it, I should say?"

Garen nodded silently. A terrible thing. People down below had lost the savings of years. And how were the people in the cities to tide over without cash, actual cash in hand, for the next few months? It was harder on the bank people than any one else. *They* had lost everything.

"And it is in the next few years that my girl needs her schooling," Damon exclaimed bitterly.

As they talked the air outside had grown strangely lurid, and the white heat of the sun became suddenly obscured by a greenish light. Damon jumped up and went to the door. "Rain! By the powers of the mountain, at last!" he ejaculated. "And a heavy one. And Dawn's over on the other side. I hope she started for home as soon as it began to cloud over. I told her she'd better stay home."

"I'll ride over and meet her," said Garen. "She'll likely come back by the upper trail, won't she?"

"Yes, that's the shortest way," Damon nodded. "And she usually rides back that way when she's been to the falls. She likes to go there when she's the least out of sorts."

"I know." Garen jumped eagerly on the horse which he'd rented from Mr. Benty. "I'll look after her, Mr. O'Neill, or she'll look after me! So long."

When Garen emerged from the aspen glade at the top of the trail it was like another world. The clear green light that looked as though one were living at the bottom of the sea had turned to a dark angry blue. About the head of the Coronado Peaks thunder rumbled mutteringly. Heat lightning flashed on distant summits. The air was disturbed, electric, menacing.

Where would Dawn be? He started down the trail into the valley. Above him and about, the clouds were massing rapidly. The mutter and rumble increased, echoing from one peak to another with solemn majesty. Garen felt a nervous response to the tension of the elements. Beyond lay Snow Lake and the gateway out of the valley where the fire had

been stopped so short a time ago. He had been the first to reach Dawn and to pull her from the water the night of the fire, while others dragged young Perry from the horse. So many heroic deeds had been accomplished that night that the girl's act had passed among the others, so unconscious had she herself been of any heroism.

She had been quite unaware of his own torturing anxiety for her that night. And now he felt most uneasy. This was going to be a tremendous electrical storm. Lightning took its toll in the mountains every year. That splendid natural quality that made Dawn so fine in his eyes made her take a joy in the elements beyond the power of mere thinking to understand or explain. While animals took shelter from the storm, she braved it. Garen was worried. What had begun with admiration for and delight in Dawn, had become a strong, deep love.

Where was she? The waterfall lay straight across the valley from him. Lightning struck the rocky summits as he looked. He could see faintly along the ridge, and as he peered intently, searching for the great tree which Dawn had showed him on that first day of theirs together, he saw a great bird wing laboriously up from a summit directly over where

the falls must be and with a few powerful wing-beats reach a dead tree, a gaunt giant standing beyond the falls.

What a monarch among birds! Huge, primeval, as the forest itself, Garen thought. But already large raindrops were falling. He pushed his horse down into the valley. He must find a shorter trail up to the falls. The storm, he felt, was gathering its powers for some fearful demonstration, and he prayed it would hold off until he could find Dawn. Surely she must already be headed toward home.

He reached the bottom of the valley. McGuire's son was hurrying through the pasture. Garen shouted to him, asking whether he'd seen Dawn. The boy pointed up to the ridge and the falls, shouting, but Garen could not hear him between the peals of thunder. Now the sky was leaden, the air green, the heavens filled with rending flashes of lightning, succeeded by claps of thunder. The noise was deafening. Then came a roar like stampeding cattle, a patter of rain on the leaves; the heavy clouds were rent by louder and more appalling successions of thunder and lightning; and a sheet of water stood between heaven and mountains. "My God, what a cloudburst!" Garen shouted futilely.

Dawn had seen the storm mounting and had lingered to watch its grandeur. From where she sat well above the waterfall she could see the peaks and the valley magnificently. Now too she could see the great pine which her father had made use of as the base for his last survey which had resulted in such hopeless variance with that of the ancient grant.

"I was wrong," she thought; "it was not the Silverstake after all." She had been so sure; she felt defeated, but not discouraged. Perhaps the silver-bearing ledge itself could be found. She was thrilled, exhilarated with the coming storm, tingling in an atmosphere vibrant with electric forces. She knew that she should be returning to the Cascada if she were to get back before the storm broke; yet she lingered, climbing a bit in this direction and then in that.

Piñon was down at the foot of the cliff, tied under a projecting shelf below the waterfall, where the foliage was dense. Clap after clap of thunder broke overhead, and the terrific echoes had not died before another followed. Now rain began to fall, and without delay Dawn commenced to scramble down to the foot of the cliff. A jagged bolt of lightning struck

somewhere on the peaks above her, and she winced in anticipation of thunder that did not come.

She'd barely make it to McGuire's cabin. Dad would know that she'd gone there. It never occurred to her that Damon would doubt her ability to take care of herself on the mountain. Suddenly she saw the golden eagle, no longer shining, but dark and majestic, his powerful wings cupped to hold the air as he sailed straight over her head.

She watched him, forgetting her own situation, as he made straight for a dead tree not far away, the same in which she had seen him before, and lit among the nest of branches at the top. There the great bird folded his wings and bent his head to the storm. The rain was now coming fast. Dawn clambered down the trail, her own head bent. She would reach Piñon and they would make what speed they could down into the valley. But before she could reach the chestnut pony she was drenched. Then one terrific flash of light smote the mountainside and threw her on her face. The skies became like an ocean turned upside down.

Cloudburst! A cloudburst never to be forgotten. If it had come the night of the fire it could have

extinguished twenty such fires. Only the shelter of the cliff saved Dawn. She was flattened against it, subdued, acquiescent, as she had never been. Stones came rolling down the slopes, gathering speed as they came, and suddenly, with a grinding roar, a great boulder shot over the ledge almost over her head, bounding downward with frightful speed. Loosed from its place by the torrents above, or perhaps by the shafts of lightning that smote the hillsides repeatedly, it tore its way down the mountain.

Dawn gasped for breath as the rain beat in on her. She pursed her lips vainly to whistle for Piñon. If he would only come to her. She shouted his name over and over, and strangely enough, through the storm her cries carried to Garen. He was fighting his way up the trail which was clearly enough marked now by the water which had followed it downward, cutting it into a rapidly deepening trench. Garen had found it almost impossible to climb, but the certainty that Dawn was above him on the mountain gave him new strength.

He pulled himself up by bushes and trees; he must make it, must cover the distance quickly before the greater deluge that follows such a downpour should wash them away as it tore down the slopes.

Piñon must be near. Dawn was calling the chestnut pony. She was calling *him*. "Garen, Garen! Piñon!" Garen Shepherd thought he heard the pony's nicker. He was blinded by the rain, but with an effort he pulled himself toward the sound. At that moment the great boulder tore its way through the trees and passed him like a landslide, following the path of the eroded trail.

His heart almost stopped with the shock of it; then he saw Piñon ahead of him. A moment's respite gave him strength to overtake the horse and he caught him by the bridle and urged him on. The chestnut pony responded gallantly. He quivered with response, his flanks shook, his nicker sounded above the storm. Garen seized him by the tail and Piñon pulled him up the slopes and under the cliff. Dawn was almost ready to let herself be washed down the mountain. She would find Piñon below and reach the valley before the water that was coming down from the peaks should wash her away anyway, crush her with its freight of stones. And then Garen was beside her. He put his arms about her and forced her back under the ledge. She saw that Piñon was there, and subsided. Presently she was clinging to Garen for support.

Piñon drooped over them, the water running down his tail. Together they weathered it through, and the chestnut pony kept them from being swept down the mountainside. They waited till the torrent should have rushed by them.

At the same moment that Dawn was thrown to the ground the golden eagle had fallen too, plunging from his lofty perch. He had been struck by the same electric bolt, had gone out in glory at the last moment of his days, spared the ignominy of falling to lesser birds or to the jackals of the wild. The ancient tree on which he had perched had also received its last blow, the *tiro de gracia*, the mercy-stroke, of the elements.

Short and terrific was the storm. Dawn unclasped her arms from Garen's neck, sighed, trembling. She had clung to him like a child. The bolt that had taken the veterans of the forest had spared them. But it had struck something in Dawn. One does not go through such an experience without coming closer to the being with whom it is shared.

"Thank goodness I found you." Garen tried to dry her off with a kerchief pulled from the saddle bag. "I was afraid when the storm broke, Dawn. Why do you take such risks?"

"I love it," she answered, "but this time I was frightened. I called Piñon, but he didn't hear me."

"I did," Garen replied. "You called me too."

She had not known it and looked at him in surprise. Garen was drenched, muddy, his clothes half torn off. His face was smudged and scratched, his fingers bleeding. Affection and gratitude shone from her wide eyes.

"Dawn, Dawn," Garen stammered, "I'm not much, but—but—"

Impulsively she leaned toward him and kissed his cheek.

"You're all a man should be."

He wanted to shout and yell. He shook her rapturously. "Including a bath and a close shave, eh?" he shouted in her ear.

The rain had stopped, but the deluge was still rushing down the mountain side with fearful velocity. Already they could hear the roar of the falls above, and of the stream below in the canyon opening into McGuire's pasture.

What had become of the eagle? Dawn looked up; he was gone. The tree itself was gone!

"Let us start down now, Dawn," Garen was saying. "I think we can make it."

"Oh, Garen, I must see where the lightning struck over there. It's just a little way. We couldn't be any wetter." She was already leading Piñon through the drenched shrubbery, and Garen had to follow. The blasted pine loomed before them; the trunk still stood, but it was split down into the earth. At its foot lay the golden eagle, conquered only by death at the hands of the mountain. Tenderly Dawn stooped to look at the great creature. "See, Garen."

Then the riven tree gaped before her. It confronted her with something. She peered closer, saw and gasped. There on the heart-wood, exposed by the lightning shaft which had split it neatly, laying it bare for the first time since the healing bark had closed over it so many years ago, *there* was the "witness blaze" of the old Pueblo grant! "Garen, look!" They came closer. Together they stooped above it.

It was unmistakable. On a smooth surface of the pine it was still clearly written for all the world to read:

> Northeast corner of the grant made to the Pueblos of Picuris; Anno domini 1870.

And beneath the legend:

70 feet east and south this point by 30 paces the vein of the Silverstake mine lies, following the mother vein to the fault.

"This is an act of God," Dawn said. She passed her hand over the writing traced there so long ago by the early surveyors. Why had they not returned to work the mine themselves? That the surveyors had never again penetrated this wilderness to claim the discovery was clear. But the story had survived; had even been entered in the public records. No wonder that no one had ever been able to find the witness tree.

Garen was profoundly impressed. What instinct had led her here? "No one but you, Dawn," he said, "would have been drawn to this spot at such a time." Some subtle connection between her and the wild, he felt, surely existed.

But if it had not been for the golden eagle she would never have found the tree. Before any one came that way again the surface of the exposed wood might become so weathered that the inscription would have looked like the meanderings of a worm through the dead tree. The trunk of the old pine was still sound wood, and the heart-wood was still

firm and colored darkly, the wood about it still light and resinous. Great growth-rings encircled the core. The tree had stood alone in its youth, receiving plenty of light, growing to great size. That was undoubtedly why it had been chosen as the witness tree.

"To think," murmured Dawn, almost forgetting Garen, "that you have stood all these years, until this moment, growing by day, sleeping at night, covering your secret, month by month, year by year, hiding it until this moment. Oh, witness tree, wait till I fetch Damon!"

She could not take the golden eagle with her; yet she could not bear to leave him to be rent by the creatures of the forest. So Garen lifted him and laid him on a ledge of rock where he might lie covered by stones till some one could return to get the splendid wings for Dawn. Then she mounted Piñon and turned his head down the mountain. Garen found his own horse just over the top of the ridge.

It had begun to rain again, and although the fury of the storm had been spent, still the rain fell in sheets. Sometimes they had to take shelter under the pines to keep from being washed down the mountain side. Eventually they reached McGuire's cabin

just as a fresh outburst shut off all view of the hills about them. None but the anchored trees could have held a place on the slopes. Rocks were loosened and rolled down as though by the ocean's waves.

In McGuire's cabin Dawn and Garen sat before the fire, wrapped in blankets and old clothes while their own things dried, and were plied with hot coffee by Mrs. McGuire. All telephone wires were down, so that Dawn could not call her father. The cabin was crowded with children, dogs, a young deer, and a little striped coon.

"Come, Dawn," Mrs. McGuire was bustling about with motherly solicitude; "lay right down on the seat and go to sleep, girlie. You must be clean tuckered out. I'd put ye in a bedroom, but the baby's in one with the old man, and grandma's in the other. She didn't sleep all night with the toothache, and she sleeps awful light."

Dawn nodded and smiled. She was warm and safe and relaxed. The seat was too short for her feet, but Garen took her head on his shoulder, and while the children played about them she slept the deep sleep of exhaustion. Mrs. McGuire nodded meaningly to her husband, and they turned their backs and went into the kitchen.

CHAPTER XII

HEART-WOOD

"Yes, you bet I testified," recounted Hinray, who stood before a mirror hung against a tree and combed his mustaches. "I seen it with my own eyes. 'Twas all the better that the tree *was* old. You can't counterfeit *old* heart-wood. No! Nature ain't to be duplicated.

"There she read, just as pretty: Silverstake claim, 70 feet east, and south by 30 paces, and on—"

"But when is my father coming back?" Dawn persisted. "Now that the Indian thing is straightened up why doesn't he come back? I expected him

yesterday morning and again this morning. What's that you have, Hinray? Give it to me now. It's mail."

With exasperating deliberation Hinray was sorting out some very dirty envelopes from one or two fairly clean ones. He handed her a heavy, important-looking envelope.

"That'll be from the Irrigation Service, I take it."

"Yes, one might guess it from the letterhead," Dawn replied witheringly.

Hinray appeared not to notice her sarcasm or to have further interest in the letter.

"Oh!" Dawn exclaimed, too disappointed to hide her feelings. "It's from Garen, and he can't get away till Thanksgiving. That's six weeks! He sends two paper clippings. Look, Hinray!" She cried excitedly and thrust the paper before him. "It's all about the Silverstake tree, and me finding it. Read it."

The evidence of the Reservation boundary recently located was unmistakable, so the article said; the disputed boundary of the Indian Reservation was now settled, for never had there been any doubt of the validity of the original grant. With the discovery of the old blaze had also come to light the exact location of an ancient silver working, long

since forgotten, but referred to in old records and remembered by the Indians. There was still evidence of a long-abandoned shaft on the Indian Reservation, and the vein extended along the mountain to the edge of the Forest Reserve where there was a fault or slipping of the rock. There had been only one claim filed on the faulted vein in the last forty years, and that had been made ten years ago by Damon O'Neill, forest ranger.

Dawn shouted with delight. "Read, read," Hinray counseled, and she continued. "The immediate workings in the shaft of the Pueblo mine, it was said by the caciques of the Tesuque and Picuris pueblos, had been exhausted, and there was a curse on the mine. One of their chiefs had been killed there by an arrow from the Spirit of the Mountain. Others among the young men thought that it was because the shaft was so inaccessible that work in it had been abandoned. It was less trouble for the Pueblo to get silver for jewelry by working for the white man."

The article went on to say that the Pueblos, a simple agrarian people, were more interested in their water rights and their crops than anything else, and that now that the source of their rivers had been

determined and secured to them, they were satisfied. Through the white friends of the Pueblos the use of their own water had been restored to them, so that never again even in a time of drouth would they be made to suffer for lack of water as they had been in the past ten to twenty years, particularly this summer.

At the end of the article Dawn read the simple statement, " 'The finding of the exact location of the old witness tree was made by Miss Dawn O'Neill, daughter of the Forest Ranger, Damon O'Neill.'

"Dad's probably getting his sample assayed," Dawn said. "The claim is his; he can sell it or work it himself if he wants to. Can't he, Hinray?"

"He can that," Hinray agreed, "but I misdoubt iffen he'll want to. If you sell it and it proves to be worth the sellin' or buyin', that'll mean an awful mess in the best stand of timber left up there. It'll mean workin's and noises of cranes and pulleys and ingines and dynamitin'."

"But I thought, Hinray," Dawn faltered, "that this kind of mining would all be done underground. I thought a shaft and maybe a small engine would be all they'd need."

"And how would they get the ore out?" Hinray pursued relentlessly. "And where would the miners live? They'd not want to climb up from McGuire's valley every morning and down every night. No, sirree. Ever go to a silver mine? See them great steam shovels?"

"But, Hinray, don't be a silly. Those are what they use at the great ghino copper mines, where the ore runs only two per cent. to the ton and is scooped by steam shovel. *This* ore is rich, rich! And they'd pack it down by burro to the railroad."

"Mm-mm. Would they now? Do you think if Perry and that gang got interested they'd stop at a *burro load* of rich ore? Not them. They'd have a railroad spur run right up into the mountains, that's what. Look at what they do just to get timber out. Build camps, stores, railroads. They have to. Thing to do is work it yourselves. Little by little as you can."

Dawn was visibly depressed. "But Dad's no miner, and I'm surely not. I don't want to work underground, Hinray, at the *roots* of trees, or in the heart of the mountain. We're foresters, Hinray, the two of us."

"Well," Hinray concluded consolingly, "perhaps

Perry and them'll buy it from yore father. Now they've been shet out of the Indian Reservation range they've had to sell their cattle. But Gershwin took no loss. Not he! Mark my words. 'Twas a fine set of cattle his herders drove down to the stockyards to ship east. What profit Perry made he lost in the bank. He brought nothin' with him; he took nothin' away."

"And the James?" Dawn queried. "How did they come out? I never heard."

"I reckon that poor fellow had to let his profit go, if he had any, to cover his loan. But if he had any cash in hand I hope he kept holt of it." Hinray was a confirmed skeptic about the ways of the financial world.

Dawn sat idly on the porch, her back against the wall, grateful for the October sun. Shep lay with his head in her lap, and Piñon was grazing near the cabin. The trees parted below them at the ford where the trail turned up the Cascada, and a rider appeared. It was an Indian, mounted on a little cream-colored pony. The diminutive creature plodded slowly up the incline to the porch, weary as though it had traveled far that day. The Indian slid from his horse as Dawn greeted him. It was Julio, a boy

who had worked for Damon in restoring Pueblo cave dwellings. He was a nephew of the rain-priest.

Julio seated himself on the steps and Dawn asked him if he would have food, but he shook his head gravely and courteously. The boss, her father, where was he? Dawn explained that Damon had gone into town two days after the storm and had not yet returned. They were expecting him the next day. Julio remained quiet and reflective a while and then turned to her and said in a manner both sorrowful and proud, "We have found him, the Priest of the Rain. He has gone to the Dance Hall of the Dead. For two days we have searched."

Dawn was mystified. In reply to her eager questions Julio told the story. "He was a great rain-maker, Mi-uchin," he concluded devoutly. "Never have we had such rain in our lifetime in response to prayer. For one week he fasted and prayed in the mountains, and you saw—" He waved his hand about the heavens.

"But none knew where he had gone or that he had gone. When he did not return during the days following the rain, we came to search for him—I leading the young men, for I thought I knew

where he would be. But we found him not there. —Mi-uchin gave his life in exchange for the rain, for when at last it came it took him. He lay in the stream, washed, and with a great happiness upon his face—" The boy fell silent. Dawn had no further words; her tender pity had been sympathy enough.

At length the boy drew a deerskin pouch from his pocket. "I have brought this for you," he said. "It is a gift from our people for you." He held out a chain of white shell from which hung an emblem of turquoise mosaic of unusual design. "For you," Julio repeated, "because of your friendship for our people. And that you have saved their land and their water. The forest has held our secret since the boyhood of my grandfather. That secret was shown to *you*. Take this." He regarded Dawn with a look of superstitious awe.

She took the luck emblem reverently. But, she told Julio, she had already been more than repaid for the chance service she had been able to do the pueblo. Long ago Mi-uchin had shown her the Source and the ancient shaft of the Indian mine. She had known all the time where the Indians came

to get their silver and where they held their spring-time ceremonies. "But no one shall ever know from me," she concluded.

"Mi-uchin knew that you were like a good tree," said Julio, "the heart-wood of which is sound. Once the heart decays the tree falls, the forest falls. It is so with men. What is graven on the stout heart remains there.

"The red men gave you the forest," he said after a while, finding his words with difficulty. "It is for you to keep it. I go. Good-by."

CHAPTER XIII

THANKSGIVING

"Well, if I'm not going to school this winter I might as well be busy." Dawn was pecking at the typewriter, copying botanical notes. Her school books were spread on the long bare table around her; a fire was burning in the fireplace. Frost had already touched the aspens, turning them into little silver trees with golden leaves. The mountain side was a glory of yellow and copper.

Hal Benty sat on the swing seat and ate piñons contentedly. "Gee, I'm glad we live up here, Dawn. Folks down in town are havin' an awful time. My aunt's husband is a butcher and now that meat's so

cheap he says you can't give it away. Nobody will buy it. They're awful poor."

"Did your ma's summer boarders all pay up?" Dawn questioned sympathetically.

Hal shook his head gloomily. "Some of 'em had to borrow money from her to get back to town. She figgered it would be cheaper to let 'em go than to keep 'em and feed 'em. So they went. Never have heard from them two boys that was the cause of the fire creepin' up on me."

"Oh, you will, I think," Dawn consoled. "They were good kids. They're just broke. When they get some money they'll remember your mother. How about the Perrys?"

"Oh, yes, they settled up nearly everything before they left. Perry sent Ma a check for the last week's balance, the eggs and canned goods, after they got back. Say, that reminds me. Do you ever hear from Jack Perry?" Hal put his question slyly, he thought. In fact he had been leading up to it all afternoon. He had arrived at the stage where he got red in the face and grinned foolishly at the least provocation in Dawn's presence.

Dawn did not answer. Hal went on, "That reminds me, Dawn, here's a letter from Kansas City,

and it says J. Perry on the back. It came this morning. I brought it up to you."

"So I see," Dawn replied calmly. "Well, why didn't you give it to me then?" She reached out a hand for the letter.

What was in it? She laid it down on the table, looking at the unformed scrawly boy handwriting. Somehow she didn't want to read a letter from Jack now. She picked it up and held it before the fire, ready to toss it in; then laid it slowly down again, between the leaves of her study book. If she opened it Hal would want to know what was in it.

Damon had gone over to the Amarillo Ridge to look at the burned-over area for his final report. Dawn would not go. She could not bear to look at it now. It was but two weeks until Thanksgiving, when Garen would come. When Dad had come home from town, on the trip after the cloudburst, he had been downcast. His sample of ore, treasured for so many years, had been assayed, and showed up wonderfully well. The silver deposit would run three hundred and fifty ounces to the ton easily. But he could get no one interested in a silver mine. Why, the state was flat, suffering under

the worst depression it had ever known! There had never been such hard times. Even mining men handed the sample back to him regretfully. "Nothing doing, O'Neill, I'm afraid."

As he sat in the dusty red plush seat of the train on his way back home Damon told himself that he was an impractical fool, not fitted for the world. He was tired, discouraged. Just because he had wanted so much to send Dawn to school this winter, in spite of the bank failure, he had thought he would be able to wrest money from his claim. Even yet it was hard to give up. Damon was full of visions and tenacious. Dawn had done her part; she'd found the witness tree. Why couldn't he do his?

He brooded all the way up the grade. Last winter he'd had an offer to be forester for a big private lumber company in California. He knew how to grow trees; a good farmer he was. They offered him a fine salary. But he had just laughed. He and Dawn had money in the bank then; why, they wouldn't think of leaving the mountain and the Service. Then last spring there had been another offer from an Oregon concern—wood pulp. To superintend the cutting on a million acres! Perhaps he had been a

fool not to accept such offers. They would probably never come again. Great forest tracts were, after all, getting scarce.

Dawn was nearing seventeen; she was so well grown. She didn't want schooling so much for her self, but Damon wanted it passionately for her. She had never known anything but the mountain, but he, after all, could never forget the ambitions of his youth. Dawn should have a taste of life *beyond* the mountains; then she would return to them with even greater affection. It never occurred to him that Dawn might ever be wooed away from the life she loved. He knew better than that.

He had stepped out of Benty's old mountain rig on to the stoop of the aspen-log cabin, feeling dirty and silly in his town clothes. But Dawn's arms about his neck had restored him. They sat for hours before the fire, and Dawn listened sympathetically, the shining pebble in her palm, turning it this way and that in the firelight.

"Don't mind, Dad. We'll work the claim ourselves if no one wants it!" She laughed with delight at the idea. "Can't you see me in overalls, my face dirty, a miner's candle on my forehead? No,

Dad, when this bank failure has cleared up we'll be able to sell the mine all right, or get the cash to operate it maybe—on a small scale."

"But who knows when that will be, child? It might be five years. School can't wait forever."

"Yes, it can, Dad; as far as I'm concerned it can wait a long time," Dawn asserted stoutly. But in the days that followed this talk, she turned with more than her old interest and fervor to her books. Garen Shepherd sent her a box of his own favorite books and one or two new ones for which he'd paid quite a penny. Dawn had finished a classified list of the trees of their mountain. She had gathered rare data on seventy-five birds. What she needed was a good camera. Her own had been ruined last summer when she had attempted to swim the lake with the camera held aloft in her left hand. That was all right, but when she had tried to snap a picture of a kingfisher, treading water meanwhile, she had got a ducking and so had the camera. The camera had never recovered.

"Your notes are excellent," Garen wrote her, "and the snaps are good, the illustrations extraordinary. Did you really draw them yourself? I showed them all to Mrs. Stearn—you remember, the wife of my

chief, who entertained us—and she was immensely interested."

Dawn was enchanted. Garen's interest stimulated her, pushed her forward. She had gathered her material from love of it, but had made no attempt at orderly and complete data. Accurate classification she had insisted on. Damon had used much of Dawn's findings in his reports and had secretly hoped that in some way the Forest Service would sponsor the publication of a book on Rocky Mountain flowers when Dawn had completed her collection. It was almost ready now. She had but to mount the specimens gathered in the summer and drying now between sheets of blotting-paper.

He did not himself realize how much she knew about birds until one evening after the cloudburst, when Garen had challenged the statement of how early the golden eagle nested. With the first week of February, at over eight thousand feet altitude, too, she had *seen* eggs, Dawn told them. She knew far more about the feathered inhabitants of the forest than the ranger did.

Garen was amazed and filled with admiration. "What a contribution to the Biological Survey all this personal observation would be!" he exclaimed.

"Why, I know their bird expert is dying for just such data as you can roll off your tongue, the actual observation of an eyewitness of the habits of the birds in all the various zones in this state."

Dawn flushed with resentment. "I wouldn't tell him a word," she fired, "if he begged me on his knees. Not if he's one of the Biological Survey gang."

And nothing he could say would change her. She'd keep her facts to herself and thank Mr. Garen Shepherd to mind his own affairs. "Little spitfire," he grinned. A wild cat herself. Nevertheless Garen gave the idea that had come to him a good deal of thought.

And Dawn gave Garen a good deal of thought. She wanted him to be proud of her. Ever since the visit to the dam and the glimpse of another world, she had thought seriously of Garen. That nice lady had liked him; he was very smart. He knew figures. She had acquired a vast respect for figures. Everything he did had to be worked out by arithmetic, she suspected. But she knew more about the mountain than he did. Ah, that was something! Well, she'd just show him how much she did know. So from six to ten every long evening since the great rain, she had burned the old student-lamp while

Dad dozed before the fire, read a bit, or worked at his desk. Painstakingly Dawn wrote out all that was stored back of her level brows and in her loving heart. Enthusiasm for her task possessed her; she could remember all sorts of things that she'd seen and known ever since she could remember at all on the Cascada.

She could see that Damon had set his heart on doing something with the Silverstake claim. She could see that he brooded. Well, perhaps she could sell it for him. She knew there must be money somewhere else than in this state. A silver mine was a silver mine. One day she wrote a letter. Hal Benty took it down for her to the weekly mail that left from the village at the foot of the valley. Damon was in truth having a bad attack of depression and resentment over the loss of his money, but he would not speak of it to Dawn. He did not need to; she knew him too well. Damon could not part with the slow savings of years without a pang, or some effort to recover or replace the loss.

But when the opportunity came and father and daughter sat in the big room of the aspen-log cabin, opposite Gershwin, on a Monday before Thanksgiving, they were silent. Neither reached out to grasp

the dazzling chance. Gershwin was patient. He thought he understood them.

"I don't think you will do better than that, Mr. O'Neill," he said with an air of openness and candor. "You understand that this particular proposition will require capital. It will have to be developed on a big scale." Developed? Dawn shuddered. Gershwin went on unheeding. "Your former claim, and the new claim you've made, cover the only direct outcroppings of ore.

"I had the ground gone over last summer by expert mining engineers. The mountain is full of faulted veins, and the risk of locating the mother vein would be too much of a venture. You might sink a million and not strike ore. There's enough exposed on your claims, however, to justify following the vein along, although it will take capital to cover the initial investment: shafts, tracks, engines, and so on."

He waited again for three, five minutes. "Well, what do you say? I'll make you an offer—" he spoke slowly, letting out each word impressively and as though testing its effect. "I'll make you an offer—of—" He named a sum far beyond their wildest dreams, twenty-five thousand dollars, fifteen thou-

sand down and ten more in the next six months. Damon almost put his head in his hands. The agony of indecision was terrible. Dawn did not speak. She was waiting to hear what her father would say.

Damon got up and paced the floor. School, travel, comfort, security, luxuries. Finally he looked at Dawn. "What do you think, daughter?"

She shook her head. "We won't sell," she said simply. Gershwin looked at her in astonishment. His wolfish intelligence was off guard. Sheer surprise overtook him, anger. They wouldn't sell? Surely that wasn't final? They'd live to regret it—that he could prophesy. It would take this country twelve years to recover from the financial blow it had suffered this summer. It would take it fifteen or twenty to begin to recover from the overgrazed condition of its ranges.

Here was a chance for them to bring in some outside capital. It would help develop the state—develop it. At that word Dawn's eyebrows pricked. Her lips set in a stubborn line. No, they would hold on to their claims just the same. Fifteen or twenty years to recover. She looked at Damon; Damon looked at her. Before them a vision of the fire-swept heights above Snow Lake materialized; in another

five years the barren slopes beyond would have grown into golden glades of aspen and cool stretches of blue spruce. Others might take up the work, some one else labor in the vineyard. Some one else? On this part of the forest? Never. Never so long as Dawn and Damon lived. She caught her lip between her teeth; stinging tears came.

Suppose Damon should decide to sell and to send her away? Sometimes he got stubborn and held to a notion, and then she knew that after all he would have his way. But Damon was thinking too.

"Why are you so greedy?" Dawn cried to Gershwin. "Didn't this summer teach you a lesson? Must every one begin again right away? Can't you wait to start in wrecking the forest? I'd rather live right here the rest of my life than anywhere. I don't want to hear engines snorting, whistles screeching, under the Three Sister Peaks. I don't want to see one tree cut on the most perfect spot on the mountain. If the fire spared it that's the least that we can do."

"I thought last summer that you were a very sensible young woman." Gershwin glared, rolling his big cigar betweeen his lips. "But now you are behaving foolishly."

"Well, O'Neill, if you change your mind in the

next ten days let me know. The offer won't be open indefinitely." Gershwin got into the mountain wagon, which sagged perilously from his great girth, and it rolled down the hill, forded the Cascada, and disappeared through the trees.

Dawn heaved a great sigh. Another peril had passed them by. "Dad," she said, pushing Damon into a chair and piling on to his lap like a young colt trying to dispose of its legs, "Dad, it's rather fun just having a silver mine for a hobby, isn't it?"

Damon could not speak. After all these years, what had he done, sentimental visionary that he was! But the spirit of the mountain that had brooded above the peaks in the shape of the soaring golden eagle still flowed about the two in the cabin on the Cascada.

"Order is Heaven's first law," he said at last. "Let us see how we have followed it on earth. Do you know that we had more range this summer, my girl, than for seven years past?"

The first snow of the season had fallen on the mountain two nights before Thanksgiving. The thermometer stood at zero at noon. Yet it did not seem cold, for there was no wind. By night the thermometer had dropped to ten below, and on the deep

silence of the dark Dawn could hear once more the wolf song, the cry of the hungry wild under the moon. She bolted the door securely, having kissed Piñon on his cool velvet nose and petted Little Sorrel. "I'd let you sleep indoors, darling, but Daddy wouldn't like it," she murmured into each pricked ear.

Back in the cabin she pored over the work spread out under the student-lamp. She must get it finished before Garen came up tomorrow. It was midnight before the last slip was pasted into place, and Dawn's eyes were a deep violet with unaccustomed fatigue. "Come, my girl," Damon said at length, "you mustn't keep at that any longer." But the task was done. The beautiful book was set on the shelf and Dawn tumbled into bed. Tomorrow would be a great day. Garen Shepherd reached the cabin on the Cascada about three o'clock. He brought with him many good things that did not suggest hard times. Cigars of the finest for Damon, the red wine he had promised, candy for Dawn, and dainties she'd never eaten in her life. Last of all he pulled a letter from his pocket. It was from Mrs. Stearn, their hostess of last summer; an invitation for Dawn to visit the Stearns in Washington that winter.

Couldn't she leave New Mexico after Christmas and stay in Washington as Mrs. Stearn's guest throughout the winter? They would be in New York a while.

"Will you go?" Garen asked, his face beaming.

"Must I, Daddy? Oh, I scarcely know, Garen. But what a wonderful sound it has."

"Mrs. Stearn also invites you to come down to the dam next June and be her guest at the official opening. And"—here Garen paused impressively—"I am allowed to inform you that you will be officially asked to inaugurate the ceremony, baptize the dam. You'll do it, won't you?" Garen seized her hands boyishly.

"Do it?" Her eyes were solemn and reverent as she raised them to his. "Why, I think it's perfectly wonderful, Garen! Of course I will." He was radiant. Garen had long cherished a vision of Dawn dressed in white, standing on the summit of the dam above the blue water, drawing the cord that would let the water through the dam—the symbolical figure of the mountains.

"You know," he said, "I've always told you that you were the guardian of the water. Well, I told the chief too all about you, and he suggested you for

the baptism and said it would typify the union of the mountain and desert. Sort of poetic thing, you know? The wedding of the mountain and the plain—"

"Is weddin's bein' talked of?" Hinray D'Orsay interrupted. Hinray came in through the kitchen door and dumped his bulging sack on the hearth. Garen shrugged hopelessly.

"I have something else still to tell you, Dawn," he said later, sitting down to talk seriously, "some grand news. Your flower and bird material can be made into a book; I've talked with some publishers who will bring it out. What do you think? Could you work on it this winter, get enough in shape to show them by spring?"

She got the leather binder from the shelf, its sides bulging with the mounted cards and the typewritten sheets, and laid it in his lap. A white envelope from Kansas City fell to the floor unnoticed. Garen opened the book with delight. It was wonderful. She had done this in two months! He was astounded with the book's skill and beauty. Could he take it with him? Would she trust him?

She would. "Providing—" They both burst into laughter at memory of Dawn's animosities. Then

he must hear all about Gershwin. But the tale was soon told. Oh, yes, Garen said, fellows like that were already trying to buy up the dam reclamation facilities. Today there was no time for anything but themselves, and this vast, silent, frozen world. Twilight fell too early now, but in the morning they would snowshoe across the divide to the Silverstake pine.

The Thanksgiving dinner would be late in the afternoon, and Damon would watch the turkey roasting; Hinray would be on hand as assistant cook too. They would have wild turkey, stuffed with piñons, red wine from Pecos grapes, wild berry jelly, rice and canned vegetables. Mrs. Benty would send them mince pies, and Dawn would make a plum pudding, which she would deck with holly, and around which she would burn the brandy Dad had been saving since last year. The McGuires had promised them a large pumpkin from their fields and a sack of beans, and Hal James had sent them a kid and two young pigs, scarcely larger than shoats, for their winter larder. They were squealing and rooting now in a new corral out back on the hillside.

Hinray had brought in for his contribution some wild honey, found in the mountains, and promised

them a haunch of venison too. That would be good, for Dawn was tired of rabbit stew. They had had a lean cupboard all fall. Provisions were hard to get up here, and prices in town had gone up. Thinking of the good food they would have soon, Dawn did not mind living on beans and cornbread, with an occasional chicken. They hadn't had butter in three weeks, and she'd used the last of the lard in the biscuits and beans last night.

The bird must be stuffed tonight; so Damon tied on an apron and set himself to the task of plucking out pinfeathers while Dawn and Garen cracked piñon nuts for the stuffing and jokes for the sauce.

Fresh snow fell during the night, and when they left the cabin stoop the next morning the little snowshoe cottontail flopped before them, leaving its unguarded spoor clear as day. "It knows that it has nothing to be afraid of," said Dawn, "with that turkey and a haunch of venison inside."

It was no easy hike that Dawn took Garen on. He was fairly winded when they reached the top of the hills above McGuire's valley. Swiftly they shot down the slopes, along the ridge from which Dawn had watched the fire in the early fall. They

reached the shore of Snow Lake, frozen now, and climbed to a seat on a boulder.

"Do you know where we are?" Dawn asked. Would he ever forget?

It was the stone on which he had sat when he watched Dawn swim Piñon across the lake so long ago last summer. The snow covered the scarred bank now, but the dead trees stood exquisitely etched against the drifts. Yet the world was glistening and white, lovely as a bride. Here they had sat in the summer, and here Garen had carried Dawn when he pulled her from the water on the night of the fire. They sat for a while, resting, then made for the top of the ridge. The sun would be going down early.

Indeed, it was already dropping in a fiery disk below the western mountain. Hand in hand Garen and Dawn stood on the top of the ridge, bathed in glowing color, that waxed and waned and reappeared again on the slopes of the Coronado Peaks. As the rich afterglow crept up their granite flanks the two snowshoers dug their staffs into the snow and sped along the ridge, down the slopes, and into the deepening twilight of the Canyon of the Cascada.

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